

## Beowulf

Translation by Seamus Heaney

So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by  
And the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.  
We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.

There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,  
A wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.  
This terror of the hall-troops had come far.  
A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on  
As his powers waxed and his worth was proved.  
In the end each clan on the outlying coasts  
Beyond the whale-road had to yield to him  
And begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

10

Afterwards a boy-child was born to Shield,  
A cub in the yard, a comfort sent  
By God to that nation. He knew what they had tholed,  
The long times and troubles they'd come through  
Without a leader; so the Lord of Life,  
The glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.  
Shield had fathered a famous son:  
Beow's name was known through the north.  
And a young prince must be prudent like that,  
Giving freely while his father lives  
So that afterwards in age when fighting starts  
Steadfast companions will stand beside him  
And hold the line. Behavior that's admired  
Is the path to power among people everywhere.

20

Shield was still thriving when his time came  
And he crossed over into the Lord's keeping.  
His warrior band did what he bade them

When he laid down the law among the Danes:  
They shouldered him out to the sea's flood, 30  
The chief they revered who had long ruled them.  
A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbour,  
Ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.  
They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,  
Laid out by the mast, amidships,  
The great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures  
Were piled upon him, and precious gear.  
I never heard before of a ship so well furbished  
With battle tackle, bladed weapons  
And coats of mail. The massed treasure 40  
Was loaded on top of him: it would travel far  
On out into the ocean's sway.  
They decked his body no less bountifully  
With offerings than those first ones did  
Who cast him away when he was a child  
And launched him alone out over the waves.  
And they set a gold standard up  
High above his head and let him drift  
To wind and tide, bewailing him  
And mourning their loss. No man can tell, 50  
No wise man in hall or weathered veteran  
Knows for certain who salvaged that load.

Then it fell to Beow to keep the forts.  
He was well regarded and ruled the Danes  
For a long time after his father took leave  
Of his life on earth. And then his heir,  
The great Halfdane, held sway  
For as long as he lived, their elder and warlord.  
He was four times a father, this fighter prince:  
One by one they entered the world, 60  
Heorogar, Hrothgar, the good Halga  
And a daughter, I have heard, who was Onela's queen,

A balm in bed to the battle-scarred Swede.

The fortunes of war favored Hrothgar.  
Friends and kinsmen flocked to his ranks,  
Young followers, a force that grew  
To be a mighty army. So his mind turned  
To hall-building: he handed down orders  
For men to work on a great mead-hall  
Meant to be a wonder of the world forever; 70  
It would be his throne-room and there he would dispense  
His God-given goods to young and old---  
But not the common land or people's lives.  
Far and wide through the world, I have heard,  
Orders for work to adorn that wall stead  
Were sent to many peoples. And soon it stood there,  
Finished and ready, in full view,  
The hall of halls. Heorot was the name  
He had settled on it, whose utterance was law.  
Nor did he renege, but doled out rings 80  
And torques at the table. The hall towered,  
Its gables wide and high and awaiting  
A barbarous burning. That doom abided,  
But in time it would come: the killer instinct  
Unleashed among in-laws, the blood-lust rampant.  
Then a powerful demon, a prowler through the dark,  
Nursed a hard grievance. It harrowed him  
To hear the din of the loud banquet  
Every day in the hall, the harp being struck  
And the clear song of a skilled poet 90  
Telling with mastery of man's beginnings,  
How the Almighty had made the earth  
A gleaming plain girdled with waters;  
In His splendour He set the sun and moon  
To be earth's lamplight, lanterns for men,  
And filled the broad lap of the world

With branches and leaves; and quickened life  
In every other thing that moved.

So times were pleasant for the people there  
Until finally one, a fiend out of Hell,                   100  
Began to work his evil in the world.  
Grendel was the name of this grim demon  
Haunting the marches, marauding round the heath  
And the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time  
In misery among the banished monsters,  
Cain's clan, whom the creator had outlawed  
And condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel  
The Eternal Lord had exacted a price:  
Cain got no good from committing that murder  
Because the Almighty made him anathema                   110  
And out of the curse of his exile there sprang  
Ogres and elves and evil phantoms  
And the giants too who strove with God  
Time and again until He gave them their final reward.

So, after nightfall, Grendel set out  
For the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes  
Were settling into it after their drink,  
And there he came upon them, a company of the best  
Asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain  
And human sorrow. Suddenly then                   120  
The God-cursed brute was creating havoc:  
Greedy and grim, he grabbed thirty men  
From their resting places and rushed to his lair,  
Flushed up and inflamed from the raid,  
Blundering back with the butchered corpses.

Then as dawn brightened and the day broke  
Grendel's powers of destruction were plain:  
Their wassail was over, they wept to heaven

And mourned under morning. Their mighty prince,  
The storied leader, sat stricken and helpless, 130  
Humiliated by the loss of his guard,  
Bewildered and stunned, staring aghast  
And the demon's trail, in deep distress.  
He was numb with grief, but got no respite  
For one night later the merciless Grendel  
Struck again with more gruesome murders.  
Malignant by nature, he never showed remorse.  
It was easy then to meet with a man  
Shifting himself to a safer distance  
To bed in the bothies, for who could be blind 140  
To the evidence of his eyes, the obviousness  
Of that hall-watcher's hate? Whoever escaped  
Kept a weather-eye open and moved away.

So Grendel ruled in defiance of right,  
One against all, until the greatest house  
In the world stood empty, a deserted wall stead.  
For twelve winters, seasons of woe,  
The lord of the Shieldings suffered under  
His load of sorrow; and so, before long,  
The news was known over the whole world. 150  
Sad lays were sung about the beset king,  
The vicious raids of Grendel,  
His long and unrelenting feud,  
Nothing but war; how he would never  
Parley or make peace with any Dane  
Nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price.  
No counsellor could ever expect  
Fair reparation from those rabid hands.  
All were endangered; young and old  
Were hunted down by that dark death-shadow 160  
Who lurked and swooped in the long nights  
On the misty moors; nobody knows

Where these reavers from Hell roam on their errands.

So Grendel waged his lonely war,  
Inflicting constant cruelties on the people,  
Atrocious hurt. He took over Heorot,  
Haunted the glittering hall after dark,  
But the throne itself, the treasure-seat,  
He was kept from approaching; he was the Lord's outcast.

These were hard times, heart-breaking 170  
For the prince of the Shieldings; powerful counselors,  
The highest in the land, would lend advice,  
Plotting how best the bold defenders  
Might resist and beat off sudden attacks.  
Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed  
Offering to idols, swore oaths  
That the killer of souls might come to their aid  
And save the people. That was their way,  
Their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts  
They remembered Hell. The Almighty Judge 180  
Of good deeds and bad, the Lord God,  
Head of the Heavens and High King of the World,  
Was unknown to them. Oh, cursed is he  
Who in time of trouble had to thrust his soul  
In the fire's embrace, forfeiting help;  
He has nowhere to turn. But blessed is he  
Who after death can approach the Lord  
And find friendship in the Father's embrace.

So that troubled time continued, woe  
That never stopped, steady affliction 190  
For Haldane's son, too hard an ordeal.  
There was panic after dark, people endured  
Raids in the night, riven by terror.

When he heard about Grendel, Hygelac's thane  
Was on home ground, over in Geatland.  
There was no one else like him alive.  
In his day, he was the mightiest man on earth,  
High-born and powerful. He ordered a boat  
That would ply the waves. He announced his plan:  
To sail the swan's roads and search out that king,       200  
The famous prince who needed defenders.  
Nobody tried to keep him from going,  
No elder denied him, dear as he was to them.  
Instead, they inspected omens and spurred  
His ambition to go, whilst he moved about  
Like the leader he was, enlisting men,  
The best he could find; with fourteen others  
The warrior boarded the boat as captain,  
A canny pilot along coast and currents.

Time went by, the boat was on water,       210  
In close under the cliffs.  
Men climbed eagerly up the gangplank,  
Sand churned in surf, shining war-gear  
In the vessel's hold, then heaved out,  
Away with a will in their wood-wreathed ship.  
Over the waves, with the wind behind her  
And foam at her neck, she flew like a bird  
Until her curved prow had covered the distance  
And on the following day, at the due hour,       220  
Those seafarers sighted land,  
Sunlit cliffs, sheer crags  
And looming headlands, the landfall they sought.  
It was the end of their voyage and the Geats vaulted  
Over the side, out on to the sand,  
And moored their ship. There was a clash of mail  
And a thresh of gear. They thanked God  
For that easy crossing on a calm sea.

When the watchman on the wall, the Shieldings' lookout  
Whose job it was to guard the sea-cliffs, 230  
Saw shields glittering on the gangplank  
And battle-equipment being unloaded  
He had to find out who and what  
The arrivals were. So he rode to the shore,  
This horseman of Hrothgar's, and challenged them  
In formal terms, flourishing his spear:

“What kind of men are you who arrive  
Rigged out for combat in coats of mail,  
Sailing here over the sea lanes  
In your steep-hulled boat? I have been stationed 240  
As lookout on this coast for a long time.  
My job is to watch the waves for raiders,  
And danger to the Danish shore.  
Never before has a force under arms  
Disembarked so openly---not bothering to ask  
If the sentries allowed them safe passage  
Or the clan had consented. Nor have I seen  
A mightier man-at-arms on this earth  
Than the one standing here: unless I am mistaken,  
He is truly noble. This is no mere 250  
Hanger-on in a hero's armour.  
So now, before you fare inland  
As interlopers, I have to be informed  
About who you are and where you hail from.  
Outsiders from across the water,  
I say it again: the sooner you tell  
Where you came from and why, the better.”

The leader of the troop unlocked his word-hoard;  
The distinguished one delivered this answer:  
“We belong by birth to the Geat people 260  
And owe allegiance to Lord Hygelac.



In her fresh tar, until the time comes  
For her curved prow to preen on the waves  
And bear this hero back to Geatland.  
May one so valiant and venturesome  
Come unharmed through the clash of battle.” 300

So they went on their way. The ship rode the water,  
Broad-beamed, bound by its hawser  
And anchored fast. Boar-shapes flashed  
Above their cheek-guards, the brightly forged  
Work of goldsmiths, watching over  
Those stern-faced men. They marched in step,  
Hurrying on till the timbered hall  
Rose before them, radiant with gold.  
Nobody on earth knew of another  
Building like it. Majesty lodged there, 310  
And its light shone over many lands.  
So their gallant escort guided them  
To that dazzling stronghold and indicated  
The shortest way to it; then the noble warrior  
Wheeled on his horse and spoke these words:  
“It is time for me to go. May the Almighty  
Father keep you and in His kindness  
Watch over your exploits. I’m away to the sea,  
Back on alert against enemy raiders.”

It was a paved track, a path that kept them 320  
In marching order. Their mail-shirts glinted,  
Hard and hand-linked; the high-gloss iron  
Of their armour rang. So they duly arrived  
In their grim war-graith and gear at the hall,  
And, weary from the sea, stacked wide shields  
Of the toughest hardwood against the wall,  
Then collapsed on the benches; battle-dress  
And weapons clashed. They collected their spears

In a seafarer's stook, a stand of grayish  
Tapering ash. And the troops themselves 330  
Were as good as their weapons.

Then a proud warrior  
Questioned the men concerning their origins:  
"Where do you come from, carrying these  
Decorated shields and shirts of mail,  
These cheek-hinged helmets and javelins?  
I am Hrothgar's herald and officer.  
I have never seen so impressive or large  
An assembly of strangers. Stoutness of heart,  
Bravery not banishment, must have brought you to Hrothgar."

The man whose name was known for courage, 340  
The Geat leader, resolute in his helmet,  
Answered in return: "We are retainers  
From Hygelac's band. Beowulf is my name.  
If your lord and master, the most renowned  
Son of Halfdane, will hear me out  
And graciously allow me to greet him in person,  
I am ready and willing to report my errand."

Wulfgar replied, a Wendel chief  
Renowned as a warrior, well known for his wisdom  
And the temper of his mind: "I will take this message, 350  
In accordance with your wish, to our noble king,  
Our dear lord, friend of the Danes,  
The giver of rings. I will go and ask him  
About your coming here, then hurry back  
With whatever reply it pleases him to give."

With that he turned to where Hrothgar sat,  
An old man among retainers;  
The valiant follower stood four-square  
In front of his king: he knew the courtesies.

Wulfgar addressed his dear lord: 360  
“People from Geatland have put ashore.  
They have sailed far over the wide sea.  
They call the chief in charge of their band  
By the name of Beowulf. They beg, my lord,  
An audience with you, exchange of words  
And formal greeting. Most gracious Hrothgar,  
Do not refuse them, but grant them a reply.  
From their arms and appointment, they appear well-born  
And worthy of respect, especially the one  
Who has led them this far: he is formidable indeed.” 370

Hrothgar, protector of Shieldings, replied:  
“I used to know him when I was a young boy.  
His father before him was called Ecgtheow.  
Hrethel the Greath gave Ecgtheow  
His daughter in marriage. This man is their son,  
Here to follow up an old friendship.  
A crew of seamen who sailed for me once  
With a gift-cargo across to Geatland  
Returned with marvelous tales about him: 380  
A thane, they declared, with the strength of thirty  
In the grip of each hand. Now Holy God  
Has, in His Goodness, guided him here  
To the West-Danes, to defend us from Grendel.  
This is my hope; and for his heroism  
I will recompense him with a rich treasure.  
Go immediately, bid him and the Geats  
He has is attendance to assemble and enter.  
Say, moreover, when you speak to them,  
That they are welcome in Denmark.”

At the door of the hall,  
Wulfgar duly delivered the message: 390  
“My lord, the conquering king of the Danes,

Bids me announce that he knows your ancestry;  
Also that he welcomes you here to Heorot  
And salutes your arrival from across the sea.  
You are free now to move forward  
To meet Hrothgar, in helmets and armor,  
But shields must stay here and spears be stacked  
Until the outcome of the audience is clear.”

The hero arose, surrounded closely  
By his powerful thanes. A party remained  
Under orders to keep watch on the arms;  
The rest proceeded, lead by their prince  
Under Heorot’s roof. And standing on the hearth  
In webbed links that the smith had woven,  
The fine-forged mesh of his gleaming mail shirt,  
Resolute in his helmet, Beowulf spoke:

400

“Greetings to Hrothgar. I am Hygelac’s kinsman,  
One of his hall-troop. When I was younger,  
I had great triumphs. Then news of Grendel,  
Hard to ignore, reached me at home:

410

Sailors brought stories of the plight you suffer  
In this legendary hall, how it lies deserted,  
Empty and useless once the evening light  
Hides itself under Heaven’s dome.

So every elder and experience councilman  
Among my people supported my resolve  
To come here to you, King Hrothgar,  
Because all knew of my awesome strength.

They had seen me boltered in the blood of enemies  
When I battled and bound five beasts,

420

Raided a troll-nest and in the night-sea  
Slaughtered sea-brutes. I have suffered extremes  
And avenged the Geats (their enemies brought it  
Upon themselves, I devastated them).

Now I mean to be a match for Grendel,  
Settle the outcome in a single combat.

And so, my request, O king of Bright-Danes,  
Dear prince of the Shieldings, friend of the people  
And their ring of defense, my one request  
Is that you won't refuse me, who have come this far, 430  
The privilege of purifying Heorot,  
With my own men to help me, and nobody else.  
I have heard moreover that the monster scorns  
In his reckless way to use weapons;  
Therefore, to heighten Hygelac's fame  
And gladden his heart, I hereby renounce  
Sword and the shelter of the broad shield,  
The heavy war-board: hand-to-hand  
Is how it will be, a life-and-death  
Fight with the fiend. Whichever one death fells 440  
Must deem it a just judgment by God.  
If Grendel wins, it will be a gruesome day;  
He will glut himself on the Geats in the war-hall,  
Swoop without fear on that flower of manhood  
As on others before. Then my face won't be there  
To be covered in death; he will carry me away  
As he goes to ground, gorged and bloodied;  
He will run gloating with my raw corpse  
And feed on it alone, in a cruel frenzy,  
Fouling his moor-nest. No need then 450  
To lament for long or lay out my body:  
If the battle takes me, send back  
This breast-webbing that Weland fashioned  
And Hrethel gave me, to Hygelac.  
Fate goes ever as fate must."

Hrothgar, the helmet of the Shieldings, spoke:  
"Beowulf, my friend, you have traveled here  
To favour us with help and fight for us.  
There was a feud one time, begun by your father.  
With his own hands he had killed Heatholaf, 460

Who was a Wulfing; so war was looming  
And his people, in fear of it, forced him to leave.  
He came away then over rolling waves  
To the South Danes here, the sons of honor.  
I was then in the full flush of kingship,  
Establishing my sway over all the rich strongholds  
Of this heroic land. Heorogar,  
My older brother and the better man,  
Also a son of Halfdane's, had died.  
Finally I healed the feud by paying: 470  
I shipped a treasure-trove to the Wulfings  
And Ecgtheow acknowledged me with oaths of allegiance.

“It bothers me to have to burden anyone  
With all the grief Grendel has caused  
And the havoc he has wreaked upon us in Heorot,  
Our humiliations. My household-guard  
Are on the wane, fate sweeps them away  
Into Grendel's clutches---but God can easily  
Halt these raids and harrowing attacks!

“Time and again, when the goblets passed 480  
And seasoned fighters got flushed with beer  
They would pledge themselves to protect Heorot  
And wait for Grendel with whetted swords.  
But when dawn broke and day crept in  
Over each empty, blood-spattered bench,  
The floor of the mead-hall where they had feasted  
Would be slick with slaughter. And so they died,  
Faithful retainers, and my following dwindled.  
Now take your place at the table, relish  
The triumph of heroes to your heart's content.” 490

Then a bench was cleared in that banquet hall  
So the Geats could have room to be together

And the party sat, proud in their bearing,  
Strong and stalwart. An attendant stood by  
With a decorated pitcher, pouring bright  
Helpings of mead. And the minstrel sang,  
Filling Heorot with his head-clearing voice,  
Gladdening that great rally of Danes and Geats.

From where he crouched at the king's feet,  
Unferth, a son of Ecglaf's, spoke 500  
Contrary words. Beowulf's coming,  
His sea-braving, made him sick with envy:  
He could not brook or abide the fact  
That anyone else alive under heaven  
Might enjoy greater regard than he did:

“Are you the Beowulf who took on Breca  
In a swimming match on the open sea,  
Risking the water just to prove you could win?  
It was sheer vanity made you venture out  
On the main deep. And no matter who tried, 510  
Friend or foe, to deflect the pair of you,  
Neither would back down: the sea-test obsessed you.  
You waded in, embracing water,  
Taking its measure, mastering currents,  
Riding on the swell. The ocean swayed,  
Winter went wild in the waves, but you vied  
For seven nights; and then he outswam you,  
Came ashore the stronger contender.

He was cast up safe and sound one morning  
Among the Heathoreams, then made his way 520  
To where he belonged in Bronding country,  
Home again, sure of his ground  
In strong room and bawn. So Breca made good  
His boast upon you and was proved right.  
No matter, therefore, how you may have fared  
In every bout and battle until now,

This time you'll be worsted; no one has ever  
Outlasted an entire night against Grendel."

Beowulf, Ecgtheow's son, replied:

"Well, friend Unferth, you have had your say 530

About Breca and me. But it was mostly beer  
That was doing the talking. The truth is this:  
When the going was heavy in those high waves,  
I was the strongest swimmer of all.

We'd been children together and we grew up  
Daring ourselves to outdo each other,  
Boasting and urging each other to risk  
Our lives on the sea. And so it turned out.

Each of us swam holding a sword,  
A naked, hard-proofed blade for protection 540

Against the whale-beasts. But Breca could never  
Move out farther or faster from me  
Than I could manage to move from him.

Shoulder to shoulder, we struggled on  
For five nights, until the long flow  
And pitch of the waves, the perishing cold,  
Night falling and winds from the North  
Drove us apart. The deep boiled up  
And its wallowing sent the sea-brutes wild.

My armor held me to hold out; 550

My hard-ringed chain-mail, hand-forged and linked,  
A fine, close-fitting filigree of gold,

Kept me safe when some ocean creature  
Pulled me to the bottom. Pinioned fast  
And swathed in its grip, I was granted one  
Final chance: my sword plunged

And the ordeal was over. Through my own hands  
The fury of battle had finished off the sea-beast.

"Time and again, foul things attacked me,

Lurking and stalking, but I lashed out, 560  
Gave as good as I got with my sword.  
My flesh was not for feasting on,  
There would be no monsters gnawing and gloating  
Over their banquet at the bottom of the sea.  
Instead, in the morning, mangled and sleeping  
The sleep of the sword, they slopped and floated  
Like the ocean's leavings. From now on  
Sailors would be safe, the deep-sea raids  
Were over for good. Light came from the East,  
Bright guarantee of God, and the waves 570

Went quiet; I could see the headlands  
And buffeted cliffs. Often, for undaunted courage,  
Fate spares the man it has not already marked.  
However it had occurred, my sword had killed  
Nine sea monsters. Such night-dangers  
And hard ordeals I have never heard of  
Nor of a man so desolate in surging waves.  
But worn out as I was, I survived,  
Came through with my life. The ocean lifted  
And laid me ashore, I landed safe 580  
On the coast of Finland.

Now, I cannot recall  
any fight you entered, Unferth,  
That bears comparison. I don't boast when I say  
That neither you nor Breca ever were much  
Celebrated for swordsmanship  
Or for facing danger in the battlefield.  
You killed your own kith and kin,  
So for all your cleverness and quick tongue,  
You will suffer damnation in the pits of hell.  
The fact is, Unferth, if you were truly 590  
As keen or courageous as you claim to be  
Grendel would never have got away with  
Such unchecked atrocity, attacks on your king,

Havoc in Heorot and horrors everywhere.  
But he knows he need never be in dread  
Of your blade making a mizzle of his blood  
Or of vengeance arriving ever from this quarter---  
From the Victory-Shieldings, the shoulderers of the spear.  
He knows he can trample down you Danes  
To his heart's content, humiliate and murder 600  
Without fear of reprisal. But he will find me different.  
I will show him how Geats shape to kill  
In the heat of battle. Then whoever wants to  
May go bravely to morning mead, when morning light,  
Scarfed in sun-dazzle, shines forth from the south  
And brings another daybreak to the world.”

Then the gray-haired treasure-giver was glad;  
Far-famed in battle, the prince of Bright-Danes  
And keeper of his people counted on Beowulf,  
On the warrior's steadfastness and his word. 610  
So the laughter started, the din got louder  
And the crowd was happy. Wealhtheow came in,  
Hrothgar's queen, observing the courtesies.  
Adorned in her gold, she graciously saluted  
The men in the hall, then handed the cup  
First to Hrothgar, their homeland's guardian,  
Urging him to drink deep and enjoy it,  
Because he was dear to them. And he drank it down  
Like the warlord he was, with festive cheer.  
So the Helming woman went on her rounds, 620  
Queenly and dignified, decked out in rings,  
Offering the goblet to all ranks,  
Treating the household and the assembled troop  
Until it was Beowulf's turn to take it from her hand.  
With measured words she welcomed the Geat  
And thanked God for granting her wish  
That a deliverer she could believe in would arrive

To ease their afflictions. He accepted the cup,  
A daunting man, dangerous in action  
And eager for it always. He addressed Wealhtheow;                   630  
Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, said:

“I had a fixed purpose when I put out to sea.  
As I sat in the boat with my band of men,  
I meant to perform to the uttermost  
What your people wanted or perish in the attempt,  
In the fiend’s clutches. And I shall fulfill that purpose,  
Prove myself with a proud deed  
Or meet my death here in the mead-hall.”

This formal boast by Beowulf the Geat  
Pleased the lady well and she went to sit                                   640  
By Hrothgar, regal and arrayed with gold.

Then it was like old times in the echoing hall,  
Proud talk and the people happy,  
Loud and excited; until soon enough  
Halfdane’s heir had to be away  
To his night’s rest. He realized  
That the demon was going to descend on the hall  
That he had plotted all day, from dawn-light  
Until darkness gathered again over the world  
And stealthy night-shades came stealing forth                           650  
Under the cloud-murk. The company stood  
As the two leaders took leave of each other:  
Hrothgar wished Beowulf health and good luck,  
Named him hall-warden and announced as follows:  
“Never, since my hand could hold a shield  
Have I entrusted or given control  
Of the Dane’s hall to anyone but you.  
Ward and guard it, for it is the greatest of houses.  
Be on your mettle now, keep in mind your fame,

Beware of the enemy. There's nothing you wish for  
That won't be yours if you win through alive."

660

Hrothgar departed then with his house-guard.  
The lord of the Shieldings, their shelter in war,  
Left the mead-hall to lie with Wealhtheow,  
His queen and bedmate. The King of Glory  
(as people learned) had posted a lookout  
Who was a match for Grendel, a guard against monsters,  
Special protection to the Danish prince.

And the Geat placed complete trust

In his strength of limb and the Lord's favor.

670

He began to remove his iron breast-mail,  
Took off the helmet and handed his attendant  
The patterned sword, a smith's masterpiece,  
Ordering him to keep the equipment guarded.

And before he bedded down, Beowulf,

That prince of goodness, proudly asserted:

"When it comes to fighting, I count myself  
As dangerous any day as Grendel.

So it won't be a cutting edge I'll wield

To mow him down, easily as I might.

680

He has no ideas of the arts of war,

Of shield or sword-play, though he does possess

A wild strength. No weapons, therefore,

For either this night: unarmed he shall face me

If face me he dares. And may the Divine Lord

In His wisdom grant victory

To whichever side He sees fit."

Then down the brave man lay with his bolster

Under his head and his whole company

Of sea-rovers at rest beside him.

690

None of them expected he would ever see

His homeland again or get back

To his native place and the people who reared him.  
They knew too well the way it was before,  
How often the Danes had fallen prey  
To death in the mead-hall. But the Lord was weaving  
A victory on his war-loom for the Weather-Geats.  
Through the strength of one they all prevailed;  
They would crush their enemy and come through  
In triumph and gladness. The truth is clear: 700  
Almighty God rules over mankind  
And always has.

Then out of the night  
Came the shadow-stalker, stealthy and swift;  
The hall-guards were slack, asleep at their posts,  
All except one; it was widely understood  
That as long as God disallowed it,  
The fiend could not bear them to his shadow-bourne.  
One man, however, was in a fighting mood,  
Awake and on edge, spoiling for action.

In off the moors, down through the mist-bands 710  
God-cursed Grendel came greedily loping.  
The bane of the race of men roamed forth,  
Hunting for a prey in the high hall.  
Under the cloud-murk he moved towards it  
Until it shone above him, a sheer keep  
Of fortified gold. Nor was that the first time  
He had scouted the grounds of Hrothgar's dwelling---  
Although never in his life, before or since,  
Did he find harder fortune or hall-defenders.  
Spurned and joyless, he journeyed on ahead 720  
And arrived at the bawn. The iron-braced door  
Turned in its hinge when his hand touched it.  
Then his rage boiled over, he ripped open  
The mouth of the building, maddening for blood,  
Pacing the length of the patterned floor

With his loathsome tread, while a baleful light,  
Flame more than light, flared from his eyes.  
He saw many men in the mansion, sleeping,  
A ranked company of kinsmen and warriors  
Quartered together. And his glee was demonic, 730  
Picturing the mayhem: before morning  
He would rip life from limp and devour them,  
Feed on their flesh: but his fate that night  
Was due to change, his days of ravening  
Had come to an end.

Mighty and canny,  
Hygelac's kinsman was keenly watching  
For the first move the monster would make.  
Nor did the creature keep him waiting  
But struck suddenly and started in;  
He grabbed and mauled a man on his bench, 740  
Bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down his blood  
And gorged on him in lumps, leaving the body  
Utterly lifeless, eaten up  
Hand and foot. Venturing closer,  
his talon was raised to attack Beowulf  
Where he lay on the bed; he was bearing in  
With open claw when the alert hero's  
Comeback and armlock forestalled him utterly.  
The captain of evil discovered himself  
In a handgrip harder than anything 750  
He had ever encountered in any man  
On the face of the earth. Every bone in his body  
Quailed and coiled, but he could not escape.  
He was desperate to flee to his den and hide  
With the devil's litter, for in all his days  
He had never been clamped or cornered like this.  
Then Hygelac's trusty retainer recalled  
His bedtime speech, sprang to his feet  
And got a firm hold. Fingers were bursting,

The monster back-tracking, the man overpowering. 760

The dread of the land was desperate to escape,  
To take a roundabout road and flee  
To his lair in the fens. The latching power  
In his fingers weakened; it was the worst trip  
The terror-monger had taken to Heorot.  
And now the timber trembled and sang,  
A hall-session that harrowed every Dane  
Inside the stockade: stumbling in fury,  
The two contenders crashed through the building.

The hall clattered and hammered, but somehow 770

Survived the onslaught and kept standing:  
It was handsomely structured, a sturdy frame  
Braced with the best of blacksmith's work  
Inside and out. The story goes  
That as the pair struggled, mead benches were smashed  
And sprung off the floor, gold fittings and all.  
Before then, no Shielding elder would believe  
There was any power or person on earth  
Capable of wrecking their horn-rigged hall  
Unless the burning embrace of fire 780

Engulf it in flame. Then an extraordinary  
Wail arose, and bewildering fear  
Came over the Danes. Everyone felt it  
Who heard that cry as it echoed off the wall,  
A God-cursed scream and strain of catastrophe,  
The howl of the loser, the lament of the hell-serf  
Keening his wound. He was overwhelmed,  
Manacled tight by the man who of all men  
Was foremost and strongest in the days of this life.

But the earl troop's leader was not inclined 790

To allow his caller to depart alive:  
He did not consider that life of much account  
To anyone anywhere. Time and again,

Beowulf's warriors worked to defend  
Their lord's life, laying about them  
As best they could with their ancestral blades.  
Stalwart in action, they kept striking out  
On every side, seeking to cut  
Straight to the soul. When they joined the struggle  
There was something they could have not known at the time, 800  
That not blade on earth, no blacksmith's art  
Could ever damage their demon opponent.  
He had conjured the harm from the cutting edge  
Of every weapon. But his going away  
Out of the world and the days of his life  
Would be agony to him, and his alien spirit  
would travel far into fiends' keeping.

Then he who had harrowed the hearts of men  
With pain and affliction in former times  
And had given offense also to God 810  
Found that his bodily powers had failed him.  
Hygelac's kinsman kept him helplessly  
Locked in a handgrip. As long as either lived  
He was hateful to the other. The monster's whole  
Body was in pain, a tremendous wound  
Appeared on his shoulder. Sinews split  
And the bone-lappings burst. Beowulf was granted  
The glory of winning; Grendel was driven  
Under the fen banks, fatally hurt,  
To his desolate lair. His days were numbered, 820  
The end of his life was coming over him,  
He knew it for certain; and one bloody clash  
Had fulfilled the dearest wishes of the Danes.  
The man who had lately landed among them,  
Proud and sure, had purged the hall,  
Kept it from harm; he was happy with his night-work  
And the courage he had shown. The Geat captain

Had boldly fulfilled his boast to the Danes:  
He had healed and relieved a huge distress,  
Unremitting humiliations, 830  
The hard fate they'd been forced to undergo,  
No small affliction. Clear proof of this  
Could be seen in the hand the hero displayed  
High up near the roof: the whole of Grendel's  
Shoulder and arm, his awesome grasp.

Then morning came and many a warrior  
Gathered, as I have heard, around the gift-hall,  
Clan-chiefs flocking from far and near  
Down wide-ranging roads, wondering greatly 840  
At the monster's footprint. His fatal departure  
Was regretted by no one who witnessed his trail,  
The ignominious marks of his flight  
Where he'd sulked away, exhausted in spirit  
And beaten in battle, bloodying the path,  
Hauling his doom to the demons' mere.  
The bloodshot water wallowed and surged,  
There were loathsome up throws and over turnings  
Of waves and gore and would-slurry.  
With his death upon him, he had dived deep  
Into his marsh den, drowned out his life 850  
And his heathen soul: hell claimed him there.

Then away they rode, the old retainers  
With many a young man following after,  
A troop on horseback, in high spirits  
On their bay steeds. Beowulf's doings  
Were praised over and over again.  
Nowhere, they said, north or south  
Between the two seas or under the tall sky  
On the broad earth was there anyone better  
To raise a shield or to rule a kingdom. 860

Yet there was no laying of blame on their lord,  
The noble Hrothgar; he was a good king.

At times the war-band broke into a gallop,  
Letting their chestnut horses race  
Wherever they found the going good  
On those well-known tracks. Meanwhile, a thane  
Of the king's household, a carrier of tales,  
A traditional singer deeply schooled  
In the lore of the past, linked a new theme  
To a strict metre. The man started 870  
To recite with skill, rehearsing Beowulf's  
Triumphs and feats in well-fashioned lines,  
Entwining his words.

He told what he'd heard  
Repeated in songs of Sigemund's exploits,  
All of those many feats and marvels,  
The struggles and wanderings of Wael's son,  
Things unknown to anyone,  
Except Fitela, feuds and foul doings  
Confided from uncle to nephew when he felt  
The urge to speak of them: always had they been 880  
Partners in the fight, friends in need.  
They killed giants, their conquering swords  
Had brought them down.

*After his death*  
*Sigemund's glory grew and grew*  
*Because of his courage when he killed the dragon,*  
*The guardian of the hoard. Under gray stone*  
*He had dared to enter all by himself*  
*To face the worst without Fitela.*  
*But nit came to pass that his sword plunged*  
*Right through those radiant scales 890*  
*And drove into the wall. The dragon died of it.*

*His daring had given him total possession  
Of the treasure hoard, his to dispose of  
However he liked. He loaded a boat:  
Wael's son weighted her hold  
With dazzling spoils. The hot dragon melted.*

*Sigemund's name was known everywhere.  
He was utterly valiant and venturesome,  
A fence round his fighters and flourished therefore  
After King Heremond's prowess declined 900  
And his campaigns slowed down. The king was betrayed,  
Ambushed in Jutland, overpowered  
And done away with. The waves of his grief  
Had beaten him down, made him a burden,  
A source of anxiety to his own nobles:  
That expedition was often condemned  
To those earlier times by experienced men,  
Men who relied on his lordship for redress,  
Who presumed that the part of a prince was to thrive  
On his father's throne and protect the nation, 910  
The Shielding land where they lived and belonged,  
Its holdings and strongholds. Such was Beowulf  
In the affection of his friends and of everyone alive.  
But evil entered into Heremod.*

Meanwhile, the Dane kept racing their mounts  
Down sandy lanes. The light of day  
Broke and kept brightening. Bands of retainers  
Galoped in excitement to the gabled hall  
To see the marvel; and the king himself,  
Guardian of the ring-hoard, goodness in person, 920  
Walked in majesty from the women's quarters  
With a numerous train, attended by his queen  
And her crowd of maidens, across the mead-hall.

When Hrothgar arrived at the hall, he spoke,  
Standing on the steps, under the steep eaves,  
Gazing at the roofwork and Grendel's talon:  
"First and foremost, let the Almighty Father  
Be thanked for this sight. I suffered a long  
Harrowing by Grendel. But the Heavenly Shepherd  
Can work his wonders always and everywhere. 930

Not long since, it seemed I would never  
Be granted the slightest solace or relief  
From any of my burdens: the best of houses  
Glittered and reeked and ran with blood.  
This one worry outweighed all others---  
A constant distress to counselors entrusted  
With defending the people's forts from assault  
By monsters and demons. But now a man,  
With the Lord's assistance, has accomplished something  
None of us could manage before now 940

For all our efforts. Whoever she was  
Who brought forth this flower of manhood,  
If she is still alive, that woman can say  
That in her labor the Lord of Ages  
Bestowed a grace on her. So now, Beowulf,  
adopt you in my heart as a dear son.  
Nourish and maintain this new connection,  
You noblest of men; there'll be nothing you want for,  
No worldly good that won't be yours.  
I have often honored smaller achievements, 950  
Recognized warriors not nearly as worthy,  
Lavished rewards on the less deserving.  
But you have made yourself immortal  
By your glorious action. May the Lord of Ages  
Continue to keep and requite you well."

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
"We have gone through a glorious endeavor

And been much favored in this fight we dared  
Against the unknown. Nevertheless,  
If you could have seen the monster himself 960  
Where he lay beaten, I would have been better pleased.  
My plan was to pounce, pin him down  
In a tight grip and grapple him to death---  
Have him panting for life, powerless and clasped  
In my bare hands, his body in thrall.  
But I couldn't stop him from slipping my hold.  
The Lord allowed it, my lock on him  
Wasn't strong enough, he struggled fiercely  
And broke and ran. Yet he bought his freedom  
At a high price, for he left his hand 970  
And arm and shoulder to show he had been here,  
A cold comfort for having come among us.  
And now he won't be long for this world.  
He has done his worst but the wound will end him.  
He is hasped and hooped and hirpling with pain,  
Limped and looped in it. Like a man outlawed  
For wickedness, he mush await  
The mighty judgment of God in majesty.”

There was less tampering and big talk then  
From Unferth the boaster, less of his blather 980  
As the hall-thanes eyed the awful proof  
Of the hero's prowess, the splayed hand  
Up under the eaves. Every nail,  
Claw-scale and spur, every spike  
And welt on the hand of that heathen brute  
Was like barbed steel. Everybody said  
There was no honed iron hard enough  
To pierce him through, no time-proofed blade  
That could cut his brutal, blood-caked claw.

Then the order was given for all hands 990

To help refurbish Heorot immediately:  
Men and women thronging the wine-hall,  
Getting it ready. Gold thread shone  
In the wall-hangings, woven scenes  
That attracted and held the eye's attention.  
But iron-braced as the inside of it had been,  
The bright room lay in ruins now.  
The very doors had been dragged from their hinges.  
Only the roof remained unscathed  
By the time the guilt-fouled fiend turned tail 1000  
In despair of his life. But death is not easily  
Escaped from by anyone:  
All of us with souls, earth-dwellers  
And children of men, must make our way  
To a destination already ordained  
Where the body, after the banqueting,  
Sleeps on its deathbed.

Then the due time arrived  
For Halfdane's son to proceed to the hall.  
The king himself would sit down to feast.  
No group ever gathered in greater numbers 1010  
Or better order around their ring-giver.  
The benches filled with famous men  
Who fell to with relish; round upon round  
Of mead was passed; those powerful kinsmen,  
Hrothgar and Hrothulf, were in high spirits  
In the raftered hall. Inside Heorot  
There was nothing but friendship. The Shielding nation  
Was not yet familiar with feud and betrayal.  
Then Halfdane's son presented Beowulf  
With gold standards as a victory gift, 1020  
An embroidered banner; also breast-mail  
And a helmet; and a sword carried high,  
That was both precious object and a token of honor.  
So Beowulf drank his drink, at ease;

It was hardly a shame to be showered with such gifts  
In front of the hall-troops. There haven't been many  
Moments, I am sure, when men have exchanged  
Four such treasures at so friendly a sitting.  
An embossed ring, a band lapped with wire  
Arched over the helmet: head-protection                    1030  
To keep the keen-ground cutting edge  
From damaging it when danger threatened  
And the man was battling behind his shield.  
Next the king ordered eight horses  
With gold bridles to be brought through the yard  
Into the hall. The harness of one  
Included a saddle of sumptuous design,  
The battle-seat where the son of Halfdane  
Rode when he wished to join the sword-play:  
Wherever the killing and carnage were the worst,                    1040  
He would be to the fore, fighting hard.  
The Danish prince, descendent of Ing,  
Handed over both the arms and the horses,  
Urging Beowulf to use them well.  
And so their leader, the lord and guard  
Of coffer and strong room, with customary grace  
Bestowed upon Beowulf both sets of gifts.  
A fair witness can see how well each one behaved.

The chieftain went on to reward the others:  
Each man on the bench who had sailed with Beowulf                    1050  
And risked the voyage received a bounty,  
Some treasured possession. And compensation,  
A price in gold, was settled for the Geat  
Grendel had killed cruelly earlier--  
As he would have killed more, had not mindful God  
And one man's daring prevented that doom.  
Past and present, God's will prevails.  
Hence, understanding is always best

And a prudent mind. Whoever remains  
For long here in this earthly life  
Will enjoy and endure more than enough.

1060

They sang then and played to please the hero,  
Words and music for their warrior prince,  
Harp tunes and tales of adventure:  
There were high times on the hall benches  
And the king's poet performed his part  
With the saga of Finn and his sons, unfolding  
The tale of the fierce attack in Friesland  
Where Hnaef, king of the Danes, met death.

*Hildeburh* 1070

*Had little cause  
To credit the Jutes:  
Son and brother,  
She lost them both  
On the battlefield.  
She, bereft  
And blameless, they  
Foredoomed, cut down  
And spear-gored. She,  
The woman in shock,  
Waylaid by grief,  
Hoc's daughter--  
How could she not  
Lament her fate  
When morning came  
And the light broke  
On her murdered dears?  
And so farewell  
Delight on earth,  
War carried away  
Finn's troop of thanes,*

1080

*All but a few.  
How then could Finn  
Hold the line  
Or fight on  
To the end with Hengest,  
How save  
The rump of his force  
From that enemy chief?  
So a truce was offered  
As follows: first  
Separate quarters  
To be cleared for the Danes,  
Hall and throne  
To be shared with the Frisians.  
Then, second ;  
Every day  
At the dole-out of gifts*

*Finn, son of Focwald,  
Should honor the Danes,  
Bestow with an even  
Hand to Hengest  
And Hengest's men  
The wrought-gold rings,  
Bounty to match  
The measure he gave  
His own Frisians--  
To keep morale  
In the beer-hall high.  
Both sides then  
Sealed their agreement.  
With oaths to Hengest  
Finn swore  
Openly, solemnly,  
That the battle survivors*

1090

*Would be guaranteed  
Honor and status.  
No infringement  
By word or deed,  
No provocation* 1100  
*Would be permitted.  
Their own ring-giver  
After all  
Was dead and gone,  
They were leaderless  
In forced allegiance  
To his murderer.  
So if any Frisian  
Stirred up bad blood  
With insinuations  
Or taunts about this,  
The blade of the sword  
Will arbitrate it.  
A funeral pyre  
Was then prepared,  
Effulgent gold  
Brought out from the hoard.  
The pride and prince  
Of the Shieldings lay  
Awaiting the flame.* 1110  
*Everywhere  
There were blood-plastered  
Coats of mail.  
The pyre was heaped  
With boar-shaped helmets  
Forged in gold,  
With the gashed corpses  
Of well-born Danes--  
Many had fallen.  
Then Hildeburh*



*Raged with storms,  
Wave and shingle  
Were shackled on ice  
Until another year  
Appeared in the yard  
As it does to this day,  
The seasons constant,  
The wonder of light  
Coming over us.  
Then winter was gone,  
Earth's lap grew lovely,  
Longing woke  
In the cooped-up exile  
For a voyage home--  
But more for vengeance, 1140  
Some way of bringing  
Things to a head:  
His sword arm hankered  
To greet the Jutes.  
So he did not balk  
Once Hunlafing  
Placed on his lap  
Dazle-the -Duel,  
The best sword of all,  
Whose edges Jutes  
Knew only too well.  
Thus blood was spilled,  
The gallant Finn  
Slain in his home  
After Guthlaf and Oslaf  
Back from their voyage  
Made old accusation:  
The brutal ambush,  
The fate they had suffered,  
All blamed on Finn. 1150*

*The wildness in them  
Had to brim over.  
The hall ran red  
With blood of enemies.  
Finn was cut down,  
The queen brought away  
And everything  
The Shieldings could find  
Inside Finn's walls--  
The Frisian king's  
Gold collars and gemstones--  
Swept off to the ship.  
Over sea-lanes then  
Back to Daneland  
The warrior troop  
Bore that lady home.*

The poem was over,  
The poet had performed, a pleasant murmur  
Started on the benches, stewards did the rounds                   1160  
With wine in splendid jugs, and Wilhtheow came to sit  
In her gold crown between two good men,  
Uncle and nephew, each of whom  
Still trusted the other; and the forthright Unferth,  
Admired by all for his mind and courage  
Although under a cloud for killing his brothers,  
Reclined near the king.

The queen spoke:  
“Enjoy this drink, my most generous lord;  
Raise up your goblet, entertain the Geats  
Duly and gently, discourse with them,                   1170  
Be open-handed, happy and fond.  
Relish their company, but recollect as well  
All of the boons that have been bestowed upon you.  
The bright court of Heorot has been cleansed  
And now the word is that you want to adopt

This warrior as a son. So, while you may,  
Bask in your fortune, then bequeath  
Kingdom and nation to your kith and kin,  
Before your decease. I am certain of Hrothulf.  
He is noble and will use the young ones well. 1180  
He will not let you down. Should you die before him,  
He will treat our children truly and fairly.  
He will honor, I am sure, our two sons,  
Repay them in kind when he recollects  
All the good things we gave him once,  
The favor and respect he found in childhood.”

She turned then to the bench where her boys sat,  
Hrethric and Hrothmond, with other nobles' sons,  
All the youth together; and that good man,  
Beowulf the Geat, sat between the brothers. 1190

The cup was carried to him, kind words  
Spoken in welcome and wealth of wrought gold  
Graciously bestowed; two arm bangles,  
A mail shirt and rings, and the most resplendent  
Torque of gold I have ever heard tell of  
Anywhere on earth or under heaven.  
There was no hoard like it since Hama snatched  
The Brosings' neck-chain and bore it away  
With its gems and settings to his shinning fort,  
Away from Eormenric's wiles and hatred, 1200  
And thereby ensured his eternal reward.  
Hygelac the Geat, grandson of Swerting,  
Wore this neck-ring on his last raid;  
At bay under his banner, he defended the booty,  
Treasure he had won. Fate swept him away  
Because of his proud need to provoke  
A feud with the Frisians. He fell beneath his shield,  
In the same gem-crustad , kingly gear

He had worn when he crossed the frothing wave-vat.  
So the dead king fell into Frankish hands. 1210  
Hey took his breast-mail, also his neck-torque,  
And punier warriors plundered the slain  
When the carnage ended; Geat corpses  
Covered the field.

Applause filled the hall.  
Then Wealhtheow pronounce in the presence of the company:  
“Take delight in this torque, dear Beowulf,  
Wear it for luck and also wear this mail  
From our people’s armory: may you prosper in them!  
Be acclaimed or strength, for kindly guidance  
To these two boys, and your bounty will be sure. 1220  
You have won renown: you are known to all men  
Far and near, now and forever.  
Your sway is wide and the wind’s home,  
As the sea around cliffs. So, my prince,  
I wish you a lifetime’s luck and blessings  
To enjoy this treasure. Treat my sons  
With tender care, be strong and kind.  
Here each comrade is true to the other,  
Loyal to lord, loving in spirit.  
The thanes have one purpose, the people are ready: 1230  
Having drunk and pledged, the ranks do as I bid.”

She moved then to her place. Men were drinking wine  
At that rare feast; how could they know fate,  
The grim shape of things to come,  
The threat looming over many thanes  
As night approached and king Hrothgar prepared  
To retire to his quarters? Retainers in great numbers  
Were posted on guard as so often in the past.  
Benches were pushed back, bedding gear and bolsters  
Spread across the floor, and one man 1240

Lay down to his rest, already marked for death.  
At their heads they placed their polished timber  
Battle-shields; and on the bench above them,  
Each man's kit was kept to hand:  
A towering war-helmet, webbed mail-shirt  
And great-shafted spear. It was their habit  
Always and everywhere to be ready for action,  
At home or in the camp, in whatever case  
And at whatever time the need arose  
To rally round their lord. They were a right people. 1250

They went to sleep. And one paid dearly  
For his night's ease, as had happened to them often,  
Ever since Grendel occupied the gold-hall,  
Committing evil until the end came,  
Death after his crimes. Then it became clear,  
Obvious to everyone once the fight was over,  
That an avenger lurked and was still alive,  
Grimly biding time. Grendel's mother,  
Monstrous hell-bride, brooded on her wrongs.  
She had been forced down into fearful waters, 1260  
The cold depths, after Cain had killed  
His father's son, felled his own  
Brother with the sword. Banished an outlaw,  
Marked by having murdered, he moved into the wilds,  
Shunning company and joy. And from Cain there sprang  
Misbegotten spirits, among them Grendel,  
The banished and accursed, due to come to grips  
With that watcher in Heorot waiting to do battle.  
The monster wrenched and wrestled with him  
But Beowulf was mindful of his mighty strength, 1270  
The wondrous gifts God had showered on him:  
He relied for help on the Lord of All,  
On His care and favor. So he overcame the foe,  
Brought down the hell-brute. Broken and bowed,

Outcast from all sweetness, the enemy of mankind  
Made for his death-den. But now his mother  
Had sallied forth on a savage journey,  
Grief-racked and ravenous, desperate for revenge.

She came to Heorot. There, inside the hall,  
Danes lay asleep, earls who would soon endure       1280  
A great reversal once Grendel's mother  
Attacked and entered. Her onslaught was less  
Only by as much as an Amazon warrior's  
In less than an armored man's  
When the hefted sword, its hammered edge  
And gleaming blade slathered in blood,  
Razes the sturdy boar-ridge off a helmet.  
Then in the hall, hard-honed swords  
Were grabbed from the bench, many a broad shield  
Lifted and braced; there was little thought of helmets       1290  
Or woven mail when they woke in terror.

The hell-dam was in panic, desperate to get out,  
In mortal terror the moment she was found.  
She had pounced and taken one of the retainers  
In a tight hold, then headed for the fen.  
To Hrothgar, this man was the most beloved  
Of the friends he trusted between the two seas.  
She had done away with a great warrior,  
Ambushed him at rest.

Beowulf was elsewhere.

Earlier, after the reward of the treasure,       1300  
The Geat had been given another lodging.  
There was an uproar in Heorot. She had snatched their trophy,  
Grendel's bloodied hand. It was a fresh blow  
To the afflicted bawn. The bargain was hard,  
Both parties having to pay  
With the lives of friends. And the old lord,

The gray-haired warrior, was heartsore and weary  
When he heard the news: his highest-placed advisor,  
His dearest companion, was dead and gone.  
Beowulf was quickly brought to the chamber: 1310  
The winner of fights, the arch-warrior,  
Came first-footing in with his fellow troops  
To where the king in his wisdom waited,  
Still wondering whether Almighty God  
Would even turn the tide of his misfortunes.  
So Beowulf entered with his band in attendance  
And the wooden floor-boards banged and rang  
As he advance, hurrying to address  
The prince of the Ingwins, asking if he'd rested  
Since the urgent summons had come as a surprise. 1320

Then Hrothgar, the Shieldings' helmet, spoke:  
"Rest? What is rest? Sorrow has returned.  
Alas for the Danes! Aeschere is dead.  
He was Yrmenlaf's elder brother  
And a soul mate to me, a true mentor,  
My right-hand man when the ranks clashed  
And our boar-crests had to take a battering  
In the line of action. Aechere was everything  
The world admires in a wise man and a friend.  
Then this roaming killer came in a fury 1330  
And slaughtered him in Heorot. Where she is hiding,  
Glutting on the corpse and glorying in her escape,  
I cannot tell; she has taken up the feud  
Because of last night, when you killed Grendel,  
Wrestled and racked him in ruinous combat  
Since for too long he had terrorized us  
With his depredations. He died in battle,  
Paid with his life; and now this powerful  
Other one arrives, this force for evil  
Driven to avenge her kinsman's death. 1340

Or so it seems to thanes in their grief,  
In the anguish every thane endures  
At the loss of a ring-giver, now that the hand  
That bestowed so richly has been stilled in death.

“I have heard it said by my people in hall,  
Counselors who live in the upland country,  
That they have seen two such creatures  
Prowling the moors, huge marauders  
From some other world. One of these things,  
As far as anyone ever can discern, 1350  
Looks like a woman; the other, warped  
In the shape of a man, moves beyond the pale  
Bigger than any man, an unnatural birth  
Called Grendel by country people  
In former days. They are fatherless creatures,  
And their whole ancestry is hidden in a past  
Of demons and ghosts. They dwell apart  
Among wolves on hills, on windswept crags  
And treacherous keshes, where cold streams  
Pour down the mountain and disappear 1360  
Under mist and moorland.

A few miles from here  
A frost-stiffened wood waits and keeps watch  
Above a mere; the overhanging bank  
Is a maze of tree roots mirrored in its surface.  
At night there, something uncanny happens:  
The water burns. And the mere bottom  
Has never been sounded by the sons of men.  
On its bank, the heather-stepper halts:  
The hart in flight from pursuing hounds  
Will turn to face them with firm-set horns 1370  
And die in the wood rather than dive  
Beneath its surface. That is no good place.  
When the wind blows up and stormy weather

Makes clouds scud and the skies weep,  
Out of its depths a dirty surge  
Is pitched towards the heavens. Now help depends  
Again on you and you alone.  
The gap of danger where the demon waits  
Is still unknown to you. Seek it if you dare.  
I will compensate you for settling the feud 1380  
As I did last time with lavish wealth,  
Coffers of coiled gold, if you come back.”

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
“Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better  
To avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.  
For every one of us, living in this world  
Means waiting for our end. Let whoever can  
Win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,  
That will be his best and only bulwark.  
So arise, my lord, and let us immediately 1390  
Set forth on the trail of this troll-dam.  
I guarantee you: she will not get away,  
Not to dens underground nor upland groves  
Nor the ocean floor. She’ll have nowhere to flee to.  
Endure your troubles today. Bear up  
And be the man I expect you to be.”

With that the old lord sprung to his feet  
And praised God for Beowulf’s pledge.  
Then a bit and halter were brought for his horse  
With the plaited mane. The wise king mounted 1400  
The royal saddle and rode out in style  
With a force of shield-bearers. The forest paths  
Were marked all over with the monster’s tracks,  
Her trail on the ground wherever she had gone  
Across the dark moors, dragging away  
The body of that thane, Hrothgar’s best

Counselor and overseer of the country.  
So the noble prince proceeded undismayed  
Up fells and screes, along narrow footpaths  
And ways where they were forced into single file, 1410  
Ledges on cliffs above lairs of water-monsters.  
He went in front with a few men,  
Good judges of the lie of the land,  
And suddenly discovered the dismal wood,  
Mountain trees growing out at an angle  
Above gray stones: the bloodshot water  
Surged underneath. It was a sore blow  
To all of the Danes, friends of the Shieldings,  
A hurt to each and every one  
Of that noble company when they came upon 1420  
Aechere's head at the foot of the cliff.

Everybody gazed as the hot gore  
Kept wallowing up and an urgent war-horn  
Repeated its notes: the whole party  
Sat down to watch. The water was infested  
With all kinds of reptiles. There were writhing sea-dragons  
And monsters slouching on slopes by the cliff,  
Serpents and wild things such as those that often  
Surface at dawn to roam the sail-road  
And doom the voyage. Down they plunged, 1430  
Lashing in anger at the loud call  
Of the battle bugle. An arrow from the bow  
Of the Geat chief got one of them  
As he surged to the surface: the seasoned shaft  
Stuck deep in his flank and his freedom in the water  
Got less and less. It was his last swim.  
He was swiftly overwhelmed in the shallows,  
Prodded by barbed boar-spears,  
Cornered, beaten, pulled up on the bank,  
A strange lake-birth, a loathsome catch 1440

Men gazed at in awe.

Beowulf got ready,  
Donned his war-gear, indifferent to death;  
His mighty, hand-forged, fine-webbed mail  
Would soon meet with the menace under water.  
It would keep the bone-cage of his body safe:  
No enemy's clasp could crush him in it,  
No vicious arm lock choke his life out.  
To guard his head he had a glittering helmet  
That was due to be muddied on the mere bottom  
And blurred in the up swirl. It was of beaten gold, 1450  
Princely headgear hooped and hasped  
By a weapon-smith who had worked wonders  
In days gone by and adorned it with boar-shapes;  
Since then it had resisted every sword.  
And another item lent by Unferth  
At that moment was of no small importance:  
The brehon handed him a hilted weapon,  
A rare and ancient sword named Hrunting.  
The iron blade with its ill-boding patterns 1460  
Had been tempered in blood. It had never failed  
The hand of anyone who had hefted it in battle,  
Anyone who had fought and faced the worst  
In the gap of danger. This was not the first time  
It had been called to perform heroic feats.

When he lent that blade to the better swordsman,  
Unferth, the strong-built son of Ecglaf,  
Could hardly have remember the ranting speech  
He had made in his cups. He was not man enough  
To face the turmoil of a fight under water  
And the risk to his life. So there he lost 1470  
fame and repute. It was different for the other  
Rigged out in his gear, ready to do battle.

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

“Wisest of kings, now that I have come  
To the point of action, I ask you to recall  
What we said earlier: that you, son of Halfdane  
And gold-friend to retainers, that you, if I should fall  
And suffer death while serving your cause,  
Would act like a father to me afterwards.

If this combat kills me, take care 1480

Of my young company, my comrades in arms.

And be sure also, my beloved Hrothgar,  
To send Hygelac the treasures I received.

Let the lord of the Geats gaze on that gold,

Let Hrethel’s son take note of it and see

That I found a ring-giver of rare magnificence

And enjoyed the good of his generosity.

And Unferth is to have what I inherited:

To that far-famed man I bequeath my own

Sharp-horned, wave-sheened wonder blade. 1490

With Hrunting I shall gain glory or die.

After these words, the prince of the Weather-Geats

Was impatient to be away and plunged suddenly:

Without more ado, he dived in to the heaving

Depths of the lake. It was the best part of a day

Before he could see the solid bottom.

Quickly the one who haunted those waters,

Who had scavenged and gone her gluttonous rounds

For a hundred seasons, sensed a human

Observing her outlandish lair from above. 1500

So she lunged and clutched and managed to catch him

In her brutal grip; but his body, for all that,

Remained unscathed: the mesh of the chain-mail

Saved him on the outside. Her savage talons

Failed to rip the web of his war shirt.

Then once she touched bottom, the wolfish swimmer

Carried the ring-mailed prince to her court  
So that for all his courage he could never use  
The weapons he carried; and a bewildering horde  
Came at him from the depths, droves of sea-beasts 1510  
Who attacked with tusks and tore at his chain-mail  
In a ghastly onslaught. The gallant man  
Could see he had entered some hellish turn-hole  
And yet the water did not work against him  
Because the hall-roofing held off  
The force of the current; then he saw firelight,  
A gleam and flare-up, a glimmer of brightness.

The hero observed that swamp-thing from hell,  
The tarn-hag in all her terrible strength,  
Then heaved his war-sword and swung his arm: 1520  
The decorated blade came down ringing  
And singing on her head. But he soon found  
His battle-torch extinguished: the shining blade  
Refused to bite. It spared her and failed  
The man in his need. It had gone through many  
Hand-to-hand fights, had hewed the armor  
And helmets of the doomed, but here at last  
The fabulous powers of that heirloom failed.

Hygelac's kinsman kept thinking about  
His name and fame: he never lost heart. 1530  
Then, in fury, he flung his sword away.

The keen, inlaid, worm-looped-patterned steel  
Was hurled to the ground: he would have to rely  
On the might of his arm. So must a man do  
Who intends to gain enduring glory  
In a combat. Life doesn't cost him thought.  
Then the prince of War-Geats, warming to his fight  
With Grendel's mother, gripped her shoulder  
And laid about him in a battle frenzy:  
He pitched his killer opponent to the floor 1540

But she rose quickly and retaliated,  
Grappled him tightly in her grim embrace.  
The sure-footed fight fell daunted,  
The strongest of warriors stumbled and fell.  
So she pounced upon him and pulled out  
A broad, whetted knife: now she could avenge  
Her only child. But the mesh of chain-mail  
On Beowulf's shoulder shielded his life,  
Turned the edge and tip of the blade.  
The son of Ecgtheow would surely have perished       1550  
And the Geats lost their warrior under the wide earth  
Had the strong links and locks of his war-gear  
Not helped to save him: Holy God  
Decided the victory. It was easy for the Lord,  
The Ruler of Heaven, to redress the balance  
Once Beowulf got back up on his feet.

Then he saw a blade that boded well,  
A sword in her armory, an ancient heirloom  
From the days of the giants, an ideal weapon,  
One that any warrior would envy,                       1560  
But so huge and heavy in itself  
Only Beowulf could wield it in battle.  
So the Shieldings' hero, hard-pressed and enraged,  
Took a firm hold of the hilt and swung  
The blade in an arc, a resolute blow  
That bit into her neck bone  
And severed it entirely, toppling the doomed  
House of her flesh; she fell to the floor.  
The sword dripped blood, the swordsman was elated.

A light appeared and the place brightened               1570  
The way the sky does when heaven's candle  
Is shining clearly. He inspected the vault:  
With sword held high, its hilt raised

To guard and threaten, Hygelac's thane  
Scouted by the wall in Grendel's wake.  
Now the weapon was to prove its worth.  
The warrior determined to take revenge  
For every gross act Grendel had committed--  
And not only for that one occasion  
When he'd come to slaughter the sleeping troops,                   1580  
Fifteen of Hrothgar's house-guards  
Surprised on their benches and ruthlessly devoured,  
And as many again carried away,  
A brutal plunderer. Beowulf in his fury  
Now settled that score: he saw the monster  
In his resting place, war-weary and wrecked,  
A lifeless corpse, a casualty  
Of the battle in Heorot. The body gaped  
At the stroke dealt to it after death:  
Beowulf cut the corpse's head off.                                   1590

Immediately the counselors keeping a lookout  
With Hrothgar, watching the lake water,  
Saw a heave-up and surge of waves  
And blood in the backwash. They bowed gray heads,  
Spoke in their sage, experienced way  
About the good warrior, how they never again  
Expected to see that prince returning  
In triumph to their king. It was clear to many  
That the wolf of the deep had destroyed him forever.

The ninth hour of the day arrived.                                   1600  
The brave Shieldings abandoned their cliff-top  
And the king went home; but sick at heart,  
Staring at the mere, the strangers held on.  
They wished, without hope, to behold their lord,  
Beowulf himself.

                    Meanwhile, the sword

Began to wilt into gory icicles,  
To slather and thaw. It was a wonderful thing,  
The way it all melted as ice melts  
When the father eases the fetters off the frost  
And unravels the water-ropes. He who wields power 1610  
Over time and tide: He is the true Lord.

The Geat captain saw treasure in abundance  
But carried no spoils from those quarters  
Except for the head and the inlaid hilt  
Embossed with jewels; its blade had melted  
And the scrollwork on it burnt, so scalding was the blood  
Of the poisonous fiend who had perished there.  
Then away he swam, the one who had survived  
The fall of his enemies, flailing to the surface.  
The wide water, the waves and pools 1620  
Were no longer infested once the wandering fiend  
Let go of her life and this unreliable world.  
The seafarers' leader made for land,  
Resolutely swimming, delighted with his prize,  
The mighty load he was lugging to the surface.  
His thanes advanced in a troop to meet him,  
Thanking God and taking great delight  
In seeing their prince back safe and sound.  
Quickly the hero's helmet and mail-shirt  
Were loosed and unlaced. The lake settled, 1630  
Clouds darkened above the bloodshot depths.

With high hearts they headed away  
Along footpath and trails through the fields,  
Roads that they knew, each of them wrestling  
With the head they were carrying from the lakeside cliff,  
Men kingly in their courage and capable  
Of difficult work. It was a task for four  
To hoist Grendel's head on a spear

And bear it under strain to the bright hall.  
But soon enough they neared the place, 1640  
Fourteen Geats in fine fettle,  
Striding across the outlying ground  
In a delighted throng around they leader.

In he came then, the thane's commander,  
The arch-warrior, to address Hrothgar:  
His courage was proven, his glory was secure.  
Grendel's head was hauled by the hair,  
Dragged across the floor where people were drinking,  
A horror for both queen and company to behold.  
They stared in awe. It was an astonishing sight. 1650

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
"So, son of Halfdane, prince of the Shieldings,  
We are glad to bring this booty from the lake.  
It is a token of triumph and we tender it to you.  
I barely survived the battle underwater.  
It was hard-fought, a desperate affair  
That could have gone badly; if God had not helped me,  
The outcome would have been quick and fatal.  
Although Hrunting is hard-edged,  
I could never bring it to bear in battle. 1660  
But the Lord of Men allowed me to behold--  
For he often helps the unbefriended--  
An ancient sword shinning on the wall,  
A weapon made for giants, there for the wielding.  
Then my moment came in the combat and I struck  
The dwellers in that den. Next thing the damascened  
Sword blade melted; it bloated and it burned  
In their rushing blood. I have wrested the hilt  
From the enemies' hand, avenged the evil  
Done to the Danes; it is what was due. 1670  
And this I pledge, O prince of the Shieldings:

You can sleep secure with your company of troops  
In Heorot Hall. Never need you fear  
For a single thane of your sept or nation,  
Young warriors or old, that laying waste of life  
That you and your people endured of yore.”

Then the gold hilt was handed over  
To the old lord, a relic from long ago  
For the venerable ruler. That rare smith work  
Was passed on to the prince of the Danes 1680  
When those devils perished; once death removed  
That murdering, guilt-steeped, God-cursed fiend,  
Eliminating his unholy life  
And his mother’s as well, it was willed that the king  
Who of all the lavish gift-lords of the north  
Was the best regarded between the two seas.

Hrothgar spoke; he examined the hilt,  
That relic of old times. It was engraved all over  
And showed how war first came into the world  
And the flood destroyed the tribe of giants. 1690  
They suffered a terrible severance from the Lord;  
The Almighty made the waters rise,  
Drowned them in the deluge for retribution.

In pure gold inlay on the sword-guards  
There were rune markings correctly incised,  
Stating and recording for whom the sword  
Had been first made and ornamented  
With its scrollwork hilt. Then everyone hushed  
As the son of Halfdane spoke his wisdom.  
“A protector of his people, pledged to uphold 1700  
Truth and justice and to respect tradition,  
Is entitled to affirm that this man  
Was born to distinction. Beowulf, my friend,  
Your fame has gone far and wide,

You are known everywhere. In all things you are even-tempered,  
Prudent and resolute. So I stand firm by the promise of friendship  
We exchanged before. Forever you will be  
Your people's mainstay and your own warriors'  
Helping hand.

Heremod was different,  
The way he behaved to Ecgwala's sons. 1710

His rise in the world brought little joy  
To the Danish people, only death and destruction.  
He vented his rage on people he caroused with,  
Killed his own comrades, a pariah king  
Who cut himself off from his own kind,  
Even though God Almighty had made him  
Eminent and powerful and marked him from the start  
For a happy life. But a change happened,  
He grew bloodthirsty, gave no more rings  
To honor the Danes. He suffered in the end 1720  
For having plagued his people for so long:  
His life lost happiness.

So learn from this  
And understand true values. I who tell you  
Have wintered into wisdom.

It is a great wonder  
How Almighty God in his magnificence  
Favors our race with rank and scope  
And the gift of wisdom; His sway is wide.  
Sometimes He allows the mind of a man  
Of distinguished birth to follow its bent,  
Grants him fulfillment and felicity on earth 1730  
And forts to command in his own country.  
He permits him to lord it in many lands  
Until the man in his unthinkingness  
Forgets that it will ever end for him.  
He indulges his desires; illness and old age  
Mean nothing to him; his mind is untroubled

By envy or malice or thought of enemies  
With their hate-honed swords. The whole world  
Conforms to his will, he is kept from the worst  
Until an element of overweening 1740  
Enters him and takes hold  
While the soul's guard, its sentry, drowns,  
Grown too distracted. A killer stalks him,  
An archer who draws a deadly bow.  
And then the man is hit in the heart,  
The arrow flies beneath his defenses,  
The devious promptings of the demon start.  
His old possessions seem paltry to him now.  
He covets and resents; dishonors custom  
And bestows no gold; and because of good things 1750  
That the Heavenly powers gave him in the past  
He ignores the shape of things to come.  
Then finally the end arrives  
When the body he was lent collapses and falls  
Prey to its death; ancestral possessions  
And the goods he hoarded and inherited by another  
Who lets them go with a liberal hand.

“O flower of warriors, beware of that trap.  
Choose, dear Beowulf, the better part,  
Eternal rewards. Do not give way to pride. 1760  
For a brief while your strength is in bloom  
But it fades quickly; and soon there will follow  
Illness or the sword to lay you low,  
Or a sudden fire or surge of water  
Or jabbing blade or javelin from the air  
Or repellent age. Your piercing eye  
Will dim and darken; and death will arrive,  
Dear warrior, to sweep you away.

“Just so I ruled the ring-Danes' country

For fifty years, defended them in wartime 1770  
With spear and sword against constant assaults  
By many tribes: I came to believe  
My enemies had faded from the face of the earth.  
Still, what happened was a hard reversal  
From bliss to grief. Grendel struck  
After lying in wait. He laid waste the land  
And from that moment my mind was in dread  
Of his depredations. So I praise God  
In His heavenly glory that I lived to behold  
This head dripping blood and after such harrowing 1780  
I can look upon it in triumph at last.  
Take your place, then, with pride and pleasure  
And move to the feast. Tomorrow morning  
Our treasure will be shared and showered upon you.”

The Geat was elated and gladly obeyed  
The old man's bidding; he sat on the bench.  
And soon all was restored, the same as before.  
Happiness came back, the hall was thronged,  
And a banquet set forth; black night fell  
And covered them in darkness. 1790

Then the company rose  
For the old campaigner: the gray-haired prince  
Was ready for bed. And a need for rest  
Came over the brave shield-bearing Geat.  
He was a weary sea-farer, far from home,  
So immediately a house-guard guided him out,  
One whose office entailed looking after  
Whatever a thane on the road in those days  
Might need or require. It was noble courtesy.

That great heart rested. The hall towered,  
Gold-shingled and gabled, and the guest slept in it 1800  
Until the black raven with raucous glee

Announced heaven's joy, and a hurry of brightness  
Overran the shadows. Warriors rose quickly,  
Impatient to be off: their own country  
Was beckoning the nobles; and the bold voyager  
Longed to be aboard his distant boat.  
Then that stalwart fighter ordered Hrunting  
To be brought to Unferth, and bade Unferth  
Take the sword and thanked him for lending it.  
He said he had found it a friend in battle 1810  
And a powerful help; he put no blame  
On the blade's cutting edge. He was a considerate man.

And there the warriors stood in their war-gear,  
Eager to go, while their honored lord  
Approached the platform where the other sat.  
The undaunted hero addressed Hrothgar.  
Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
"Now we who crossed the wide sea  
Have to inform you that we feel a desire  
To return to Hygelac. Here we have been welcomed 1820  
And thoroughly entertain. You have treated us well.  
If there is any favor on earth I can perform  
Beyond deeds of arms I have done already,  
Anything that would merit your affections more,  
I shall act, my lord, with alacrity.  
If ever I hear from across the ocean  
That people on your borders are threatening battle  
As attackers have done from time to time,  
I shall land with a thousand thanes at my back  
To help your cause. Hygelac may be young 1830  
To rule a nation, but this much I know  
About the king of the Geats: he will come to my aid  
And want to support me by word and action  
In your hour of need, when honor dictates  
That I raise a hedge of spears around you.

Then if Hrethric should think about traveling  
As a king's son to the court of the Geats,  
He will find many friend. Foreign places  
Yield more to one who is himself worth meeting.”

Hrothgar spoke and answered him: 1840

“The Lord in his wisdom sent you those words  
And they came from the heart. I have never heard  
So young a man make truer observations.

You are strong in body and mature in mind,  
Impressive in speech. If it should come to pass  
That Hrethel's descendant dies beneath a spear,  
If deadly battle or the sword blade or disease  
Fells the prince who guards your people  
And you are still alive, I firmly believe

The seafaring Geats won't find a man 1850

Worthier of acclaim as their king and defender  
Than you, if only you would undertake  
The lordship of your homeland. My liking for you  
Deepens with time, dear Beowulf.

What you have done is to draw two peoples,  
The Geat nation and us neighboring Danes,  
Into shared peace and a pact of friendship  
In spite of hatreds we have harbored in the past.

For as long as I rule this far-flung land  
Treasures will change hands and each side will treat 1860

The other with gifts; across the gannet's bath,  
Over the broad sea, whorled prows will bring  
Presents and tokens. I know your people  
Are beyond reproach in every respect,  
Steadfast in the old way with friend or foe.”

Then the earl's defender furnished the hero  
With twelve treasures and told him to set out,  
Sail with those gifts safely home

To the people he loved, but to return promptly.  
And so the good and gray-haired Dane, 1870  
That high-born king, kissed Beowulf  
And embraced his neck, then broke down  
In sudden tears. Two forebodings  
Disturbed him in his wisdom, but one was stronger:  
Nevermore would they meet each other  
Face to face. And such was his affection  
That he could not help being overcome:  
His fondness for the man was so deep-founded,  
It warmed his heart and wound the heartstrings  
Tight in his breast. 1880

The embrace ended  
And Beowulf, glorious in his gold regalia,  
Stepped on the green earth. Straining at anchor  
And ready for boarding, his boat awaited him.  
So they went on their journey, and Hrothgar's generosity  
Was praised repeatedly. He was a peerless king  
Until old age sapped his strength and did him  
Mortal harm, as it has done so many.

Down to the waves then, dressed in the web  
Of their chain-mail and war-shirts the young men marched  
In high spirits. The coast-guard spied them, 1890  
Thanes setting forth, the same as before.  
His salute this time from the top of the cliff  
Was far from unmannerly; he galloped to meet them  
And as they took ship in their shinning gear,  
He said how welcome they would be in Geatland.  
Then the broad hull was beached on the sand  
To be cargoes with treasure, horses and war-gear.  
The curved prow motioned; the mast stood high  
Above Hrothgar's riches in the loaded hold.

The guard who had watched the boat was given 1900

A sword with gold fittings and in future days  
That present would make him a respected man  
At his place on the mead-bench.

Then the keel plunged  
And shook in the sea; and they sailed from Denmark.

Right away the mast was rigged with its sea-shawl;  
Sail ropes were tightened, timbers drummed  
And stiff winds kept the wave-crosser  
Skimming ahead; as she heaved forward,  
Her foamy neck was fleet and buoyant,  
A lapped prow loping over currents, 1910  
Until finally the Geats caught sight of coastline  
And familiar cliffs. The keel reared up,  
Wind lifted it home, it hit on the land.

The harbor guard came hurrying out  
To the rolling water: he had watched the offing  
Long and hard, on the lookout for those friends.  
With the anchor cables, he moored their craft  
Right where it had beached, in case a backwash  
Might catch the hull and carry it away.  
Then he ordered the prince's treasure-trove 1920  
To be carried ashore. It was a short step  
From there to where Hrethel's son and heir,  
Hygelac the gold-giver, makes his home  
On a secure cliff, in the company of retainers.

The building was magnificent, the king majestic,  
Ensconced in his hall; and although Hygd, his queen,  
Was young, a few short years at court,  
Her mind was thoughtful and her manners sure.  
Haereth's daughter behaved generously  
And stinted nothing when she distributed 1930  
Bounty to the Geats.

## Great Queen Modthryth

Perpetrated terrible wrongs.

If any retainer ever made bold

To look her in the face, if an eye not her lord's

Stared at her directly during daylight,

The outcome was sealed: he was bound

In hand-tightened shackles, racked, tortured

Until doom was announced--death by the sword,

Slash of blade, blood gush and death qualms

In an evil display. Even a queen 1940

Outstanding in beauty must not overstep like that.

A queen should weave peace, not punish the innocent

With loss of life for imagined insults.

But Hemming's kinsman put a halt to her ways

And drinkers round the table had another tale:

She was less of a bane to people's lives,

Less cruel-minded, after she was married

To the brave Offa, a bride arrayed

In her gold finery, given away

By a caring father, ferried to her young prince 1950

Over dim seas. In days to come

She would grace the throne and grow famous

For her good deeds and conduct of life,

Her high devotion to the hero king

Who was the best king, it has been said,

Between the two seas or anywhere else

On the face of the earth. Offa was honored

Far and wide for his generous ways,

His fighting spirit and his far-seeing

Defense of his homeland; from him there sprang Eomer, 1960

Garmund's grandson, kinsman of Hemming,

His warrior's mainstay and master of the field.

Heroic Beowulf and his band of men

Crossed the wide strand, striding along

The sandy foreshore; the sun shone,  
The world's candle warmed them from the south  
As they hastened to where, as they had heard,  
The young king, Ongentheow's killer  
And his people's protector, was dispensing rings  
Inside his bawn. Beowulf's return 1970  
Was reported to Hygelac as soon as possible,  
News that the captain was now in the enclosure,  
His battle-brother back from the fray  
Alive and well, walking back to the hall.  
Room was quickly made, on the king's orders,  
And the troops filed across the cleared floor.

After Hygelac had offered greetings  
To his loyal thane in lofty speech,  
He and his kinsman, that hale survivor,  
Sat face to face. Haereþ's daughter 1980  
Moved about with the mead-jug in her hand,  
Taking care of the company, filling the cups  
That warriors held out. Then Hygelac began  
To put courteous questions to his old comrade  
In the high hall. He hankered to know  
Every tale the Sea-Geats had to tell.

"How did you fare on your foreign voyage,  
Dear Beowulf, when you abruptly decided  
To sail away across the salt water  
And fight at Heorot? Did you help Hrothgar 1990  
Much in the end? Could you ease the prince  
Of his well-known troubles? Your undertaking  
Cast my spirits down, I dreaded the outcome  
Of your expedition and pleaded with you  
Long and hard to leave the killer be,  
Let the South-Danes settle their own  
Blood-feud with Grendel. So God be thanked

I am granted this sight of you, safe and sound.”

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

“What happened, lord Hygelac, is hardly a secret 2000

Any more among men in this world--

Myself and Grendel coming to grips

On the very spot where he visited destruction

On the Victory-Shieldings and violated

Life and limb, loses I avenged

So no earthly offspring of Grendel’s

Need ever boast of that bout before dawn,

No matter how long the last of his evil

Family survives.

When I first landed

I hastened to the ring-hall and saluted Hrothgar. 2010

Once he had discovered why I had come

The son of Halfdane sent me immediately

To sit with his own sons on the bench.

It was a happy gathering. In my whole life

I have never seen mead enjoyed more

In any hall on earth. Sometimes the queen

Herself appeared, peace-pledge between nations,

To hearten the young ones and hand out

A torque to a warrior, then take her place.

Sometimes Hrothgar’s daughter distributed 2020

Ale to older ranks, in order on the benches:

I heard the company call her Freawaru

As she made her rounds, presenting men

With the gem-studded bowl, young bride-to-be

To the gracious Ingeld, in her gold-rimmed attire.

The friend of the Shieldings favors her betrothal:

The guardian of the kingdom sees good in it

And hoped this woman will heal old wounds

And grievous feuds.

But generally the spear

Is prompt to retaliate when a prince is killed,                   2030  
No matter how admirable the bride may be.

“Think how the Heathobards will be bound to feel,  
Their lord, Ingeld, and his loyal thanes,  
When he walks in with that woman to the feast:  
Danes are at the table, being entertained,  
Honored guest in glittering regalia,  
Burnished ring-mail that was their hosts’ birthright,  
Looted when the Heathobards could no longer wield  
Their weapons in the shield-clash, when they went down                   2040  
With their beloved comrades and forfeited their lives.

Then an old spearman will speak while they are drinking,  
Having glimpsed some heirloom that brings alive  
Memories of the massacre; his mood will darken  
And heart-stricken, in the stress of his emotion,  
He will begin to test a young-man’s temper  
And stir up trouble, starting like this:

“Now, my friend, don’t you recognize  
Your father’s sword, his favorite weapon,  
Then one he wore when he went out in his war-mask  
To face the Danes on that final day?                   2050

After Wethergeld died and his men were doomed  
The Shieldings quickly took the field,  
And now here’s the son of one or other  
Of those same killers coming through our hall  
Overbearing us, mouthing boasts,  
And rigged in armor that by right is yours.’

And so he keeps on, recalling and accusing,  
Working things up with bitter words  
Until one of the lady’s retainers lies  
Spattered in blood, split open                   2060

On his father’s account. The killer knows  
The lie of the land and escaped with his life.  
Then on both sides the oath-bound lords

Will break the peace, a passionate hate  
Will build up in Ingeld and love for his bride  
Will falter in him as the feud rankles.  
I therefore suspect the good faith of the Heathobards,  
The truth of their friendship and the trustworthiness  
Of their alliance with the Danes.

But now, my lord,  
I shall carry on with my account of Grendel, 2070  
The whole story of everything that happened  
In the hand-to-hand fight.

After heaven's gem  
Had gone mildly to earth, that maddened spirit,  
The terror of those twilights, came to attack us  
Where we stood guard, still safe inside the hall.  
There deadly violence came down on Handscio  
And he fell as fate ordained, the first to perish,  
Rigged out for the combat. A comrade from our ranks  
Had come to grief in Grendel's maw:  
He ate up the entire body. 2080

There was blood on his teeth, he was bloated and furious,  
All roused up, yet still unready  
To leave the hall empty-handed;  
Renowned for his might, he matched himself against me,  
Wildly reaching. He had this roomy pouch,  
A strange accoutrement, intricately strung  
And hung at the ready, a rare patchwork  
Of devilishly fitting dragon-skins.

I had done him no wrong, yet the raging demon  
Wanted to cram me and many another 2090  
Into this bag--but it was not to be  
Once I got to my feet in a blind fury.  
It would take too long to tell how I repaid  
The terror of the land for every life he took  
And so won credit for you, my king,  
And for all your people. And although he got away

To enjoy life's sweetness for a while longer,  
His right hand stayed behind him in Heorot,  
Evidence of his miserable overthrow  
As he dived into murk on the mere bottom. 2100

"I got lavish rewards from the lord of the Danes  
For my part in the battle, beaten gold  
And much else, once morning came  
And we took our places at the banquet table.  
There was singing and excitement: an old reciter,  
A carrier of stories, recalled the early days.  
At times some hero made the timbered harp  
Tremble with sweetness, or related true  
And tragic happenings; at times the king  
Gave the proper turn to some fantastic tale, 2110  
Or a battle-scarred veteran, bowed with age,  
Would begin to remember the martial deeds  
Of his youth and prime and be overcome  
As the past welled up in his wintry heart.

"We were happy there the whole day long  
And enjoyed our time until another night  
Descended upon us. Then suddenly  
The vehement mother avenged her son  
And wreaked destruction. Death had robbed her;  
Geats had slain Grendel, so his ghastly dam 2120  
Struck back and with bare-faced defiance  
Laid a man low. Thus life departed  
From the sage Auschere, an elder wise in council.  
But afterwards, on the morning following,  
The Danes could not burn the dead body  
Nor lay the remains of the man they loved  
On his funeral pyre. She had fled with the corpse  
And taken refuge beneath torrents on the mountain.  
It was a hard blow for Hrothgar to bear,

Harder than any he had undergone before. 2130  
And so the heartsore king beseeched me  
In your royal name to take my chances  
Underwater, to win glory  
And prove my worth. He promised me rewards.  
Hence, as is well known, I went to my encounter  
With the terror-monger at the bottom of the tarn.  
For a while it was hand-to-hand between us,  
Then blood went curdling along the currents  
And I beheaded Grendel's mother in the hall  
With a mighty sword. I barely managed 2140  
To escape with my life; my time had not yet come.  
But Halfdane's heir, the shelter of those earls,  
Again endowed me with gifts in abundance.

“Thus the king acted with due custom.  
I was paid and recompensed completely,  
Given full measure and the freedom to choose  
From Hrothgar's treasures by Hrothgar himself.  
These, King Hygelac, I am happy to present  
To you as gifts. It is still upon your grace  
That all favor depends. I have few kinsman 2150  
Who are close, my king, except for your kind self.”  
Then he order the boar-framed standard to be brought,  
The battle-topping helmet, the mail-shirt gray as hoar-frost  
And the precious war-sword; and proceeded with his speech.  
“When Hrothgar presented this war-gear to me  
He instructed, my lord, to give you some account  
Of why it signifies his special favor.  
He said it had belonged to his older brother,  
King Heorogar, who had long kept it,  
But that Heorogar had never bequeathed it 2160  
To his son Heorowearð, that worthy scion,  
Loyal as he was.  
Enjoy it well.”

I heard four horses were handed over next.  
Beowulf bestowed four bay steeds  
To go with the armor, swift gallopers,  
All alike. So ought a kinsman act,  
Instead of plotting and planning in secret  
To bring people to grief, or conspiring to arrange  
The death of comrades. The warrior king  
Was uncle to Beowulf and honored by his nephew: 2170  
Each was concerned for the other's good.

I heard he presented Hygd with a gorget,  
The priceless torque that the prince's daughter,  
Wealhtheow, had given him; and three horses,  
Supple creatures, brilliantly saddled.  
The bright necklace would be luminous on Hygd's breast.

Thus Beowulf bore himself with valor;  
He was formidable in battle yet behaved with honor  
And took no advantage: never cut down  
A comrade who was drunk, kept his temper 2180  
And, warrior that he was, watched and controlled  
His God-sent strength and his outstanding  
Natural powers. He had been poorly regarded  
For a long time, was taken by the Geats  
For less than he was worth: and their lord too  
Had never much esteemed him in the mead-hall.  
They firmly believed that he lacked force,  
That the prince was a weakling; but presently  
Every affront to his deserving was reversed.

The battle-famed king, bulwark of his earls, 2190  
Ordered a gold-chased heirloom of Hrethel's  
To be brought in; it was the best example  
Of a gem-studded sword in the Geat treasury.

This he laid on Beowulf's lap  
And then rewarded him with land as well,  
Seven thousand hides, and a hall and a throne.  
Both owned land by birth in that country,  
Ancestral ground; but the greater right  
And sway were inherited by the higher born.

A lot was to happen in later days 2200  
In the fury of battle. Hygelac fell  
And the shelter of Heardred's shield proved useless  
Against the fierce aggression of the Shylfings:  
Ruthless swordsmen, seasoned campaigners,  
They came against him and his conquering nation,  
And with cruel force cut him down  
So that afterwards

The wide kingdom  
Reverted to Beowulf. He ruled it well  
For fifty winters, grew old and wise  
As warden of the land 2210

Until one began  
To dominate the dark, a dragon on the prowl  
From the steep vaults of a stone-roofed barrow  
Where he guarded a hoard; there was a hidden passage,  
Unknown to men, but someone managed  
To enter by it and interfere  
With the heathen trove. He had handled and removed  
A gem-studded goblet; it gained him nothing,  
Though with a thief's wiles he had outwitted  
The sleeping dragon; that drove him into rage,  
As the people of that country would soon discover. 2220

The intruder who broached the dragon's treasure  
And moved him to wrath had never meant to.  
It was desperation on the part of a slave  
Fleeing the heavy hand of some master,

Guilt-ridden and on the run,  
Going to ground. But he soon began  
To shake with terror.....in shock  
The wretch.....  
.....panicked and ran  
Away with the precious..... 2230

Metalwork. There were many other  
Heirlooms heaped inside the earth-house,  
Because long ago, with deliberate care,  
Somebody now forgotten  
Had buried the riches of a high-born race  
In this ancient cache. Death had come  
And taken them all in times gone by  
And the only one left to tell their tale,  
The last of their line, could look forward to nothing  
But the same fate for himself: he foresaw that his joy 2240  
In the treasure would be brief.

A newly constructed  
Barrow stood waiting, on a wide headland  
Close to the waves, its entryway secured.  
Into it the keeper of the hoard had carried  
All the goods and golden ware  
Worth preserving. His words were few:  
“Now, earth, hold what earls once held  
And heroes can no more; it was mined from you first  
By honorable men. My own people 2250  
Have been ruined in war; one by one  
They went down to death, looked their last  
On sweet life in the hall. I am left with nobody  
To bear a sword or burnish plated goblets,  
Put a sheen on the cup. The companies have departed.  
The hard helmet, hasped with gold,  
Will be stripped of its hoops; and the helmet-shiner  
Who should polish the metal of the war-mask sleeps;  
The coat of mail that came through all fights,



Easily escape exile and woe  
By the grace of God.

The hoard-guardian

Scorched the ground as he scoured and hunted  
For the trespasser who had troubled his sleep.  
Hot and savage, he kept circling and circling  
The outside of the mound. No man appeared  
In that desert waste, but he worked himself up  
By imagining battle; then back in he'd go  
In search of the cup, only to discover                   2300  
Signs that someone had stumbled upon  
The golden treasures. The guardian of the mound,  
The hoard-watcher, waited for the gloaming  
With fierce impatience; his pent-up fury  
At the loss of the vessel made him long to hit back  
And lash out in flames. Then, to his delight,  
The day waned and he could wait no longer  
Behind the wall, but hurtled forth  
In a fiery blaze. The first to suffer  
Were the people on the land, but before long                   2310  
It was their treasure-giver who would come to grief.

The dragon began to belch out flames  
And burn bright homesteads; there was a hot glow  
That scared everyone, for the vile sky-winger  
Would leave nothing alive in his wake.  
Everywhere the havoc he wrought was in evidence.  
Far and near, the Geat nation  
Bore the brunt of his brutal assaults  
And virulent hate. Then back to the hoard  
He would dart before daybreak, to hide in his den.                   2320  
He had swinged the land, swathed it in flame,  
In fire and burning, and now he felt secure  
In the vaults of his burrow; but his trust was unavailing.

Then Beowulf was given bad news,  
A hard truth: his own home,  
The best of buildings, had been burnt to a cinder,  
The throne-room of the Geats. It threw the hero  
Into deep anguish and darkened his mood:  
The wise man thought he must have thwarted  
Ancient ordinance of the eternal Lord,                   2330  
Broken His commandment. His mind was in turmoil,  
Unaccustomed anxiety and gloom  
Confused his brain; the fire-dragon  
Had rased the coastal region and reduced  
Forts and earthworks to dust and ashes,  
So the war-king planned and plotted his revenge.  
The warriors' protector, prince of the hall-troop,  
Ordered a marvelous all-iron shield  
From his smithy works. He well knew  
That linden boards would let him down                   2340  
And timber burn. After many trials,  
He was destined to face the end of his days  
In this mortal world; as was the dragon,  
For all his leasehold on the treasure.

Yet the prince of the rings was too proud  
To line up with a large army  
Against the sky-plague. He had scant regard  
For the dragon as a threat, no dread at all  
Of its courage or strength, for he had kept going  
Often in the past, through perils and ordeals                   2350  
Of every sort, after he had purged  
Hrothgar's hall, triumphed in Heorot  
And beaten Grendel. He outgrappled the monster  
And his evil kin.

                  One of his cruelest  
Hand-to-hand encounters had happened  
When Hygelac, king of the Geats, was killed

In Friesland: the people's friend and lord,  
Hrethel's son, slaked a sword blade's  
Thirst for blood. But Beowulf's prodigious  
Gifts as a swimmer guaranteed his safety: 2360  
He arrived at the shore, shouldering thirty  
Battle-dresses, the booty he had won.  
There was little for the Hetware to be happy about  
As they shielded their faces and fighting on the ground  
Began in earnest. With Beowulf against them,  
Few could hope to return home.

Across the wide sea, desolate and alone,  
The son of Ecgtheow swam back to his people.  
There Hygd offered him throne and authority  
As lord of the ring-hoard: with Hygelac dead, 2370  
She had no belief in her son's ability  
To defend their homeland against foreign invaders.  
Yet there was no way the weakened nation  
Could get Beowulf to give in and agree  
To be elevated over Heardred as his lord  
Or to undertake the office of kingship.  
But he did provide support for the prince,  
Honored and minded him until he matured  
As the ruler of Geatland.

Then over sea-roads  
Exiles arrived, sons of Ohthere. 2380  
They had rebelled against the best of all  
The sea-kings in Sweden, the one who held sway  
In the Shylfing nation, their renowned prince,  
Lord of the mead-hall. That marked the end  
For Hygelac's son: his hospitality  
Was mortally rewarded with wounds from a sword.  
Heardred lay slaughtered and Onela returned  
To the land of Sweden, leaving Beowulf  
To ascend the throne, to sit in majesty

And rule over the Geats. He was a good king. 2390

In days to come, he contrived to avenge  
The fall of his prince; he befriended Eadgils  
When Eadgils was friendless, aiding his cause  
With weapons and warriors over the wide sea,  
Sending him men. The feud was settled  
On a comfortless campaign when he killed Onela.

And so the son of Ecgtheow had survived  
Every extreme, excelling himself  
In daring and in danger, until the day arrived  
When he had to come face to face with the dragon. 2400  
The lord of the Geats took eleven comrades  
And went in a rage to reconnoiter.  
By then he had discovered the cause of the affliction  
Being visited on the people. The precious cup  
Had come to him from the hand of the finder,  
The one who had started all this strife  
And was now added as a thirteenth to their number.  
They press-ganged and compelled this poor creature  
To be their guide. Against his will  
He led them to the earth-vault he alone knew, 2410  
An underground barrow near the sea-billows  
And heaving waves, heaped inside  
With exquisite metalwork. The one who stood guard  
Was dangerous and watchful, warden of that trove  
Buried under earth: no easy bargain  
Would be made in that place by any man.

The veteran king sat down on the cliff-top.  
He wished good luck to the Geats who had shared  
His hearth and his gold. He was sad at heart,  
Unsettled yet ready, sensing his own death. 2420  
His fate hovered near, unknowable but certain:

It would soon claim his coffered soul,  
Part life from limb. Before long  
The prince's spirit would spin free from his body.

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

“Many a skirmish I survived when I was young  
And many times of war; I remember them well.

At seven, I was fostered out by my father,  
Left in the charge of my people's lord.

King Hrethel kept me and took care of me, 2430  
Was open-handed, behaved like a kinsman.

While I was his ward, he treated me no worse  
As a wean about the place than one of his own boys,  
Herebeald and Haethcyn, or my own Hygelac.

For the eldest, Herebeald, an unexpected  
Deathbed was laid out, through a brother's doing,

When Haethcyn bent his horn-tipped bow  
And loosed the arrow that destroyed his life.

He shot wide and buried a shaft 2440  
In the flesh and blood of his own brother.

That offence was beyond redress, a wrong footing  
Of the heart's affections; for who could avenge

The prince's life or pay his death-price?

It was like the misery felt by an old man

Who has lived to see his son's body

Swing on the gallows. He begins to keen

And weep for his boy, watching the raven

Gloat where he hangs: he can be of no help.

The wisdom of age is worthless to him.

Morning after morning, he wakes to remember 2450

That his child is gone; he has no interest

In living on until another heir

Is born in the hall, now that his first-born

Has entered death's dominion forever.

He gazes sorrowfully at his son's dwelling,

The banquet hall bereft of all delight,  
The windswept hearthstone; the horsemen are sleeping,  
The warriors underground; what was is no more.  
No tunes from the harp, no cheer raised in the yard.  
Alone with his longing, he lies down on his bed 2460  
And sings a lament; everything seems too large,  
The steadings and the fields.

Such was the feeling  
Of loss endured by the lord of the Geats  
After Herebeald's death. He was hopelessly placed  
To set to rights the wrong committed,  
Could not punish the killer in accordance of the law  
Of the blood-feud, although he felt no love for him.  
Heartsore, wearied, he turned away  
From life's joys, chose God's light  
And departed, leaving buildings and lands 2470  
To his sons, as a man of substance will.

“Then over the wide seas Swedes and Geats  
Battled and feuded and fought without quarter.  
Hostilities broke out when Hrethel died.  
Ongentheow's sons were unrelenting,  
Refusing to make peace, campaigning violently  
From coast to coast, constantly setting up  
Terrible ambushes around Hreasnshill.  
My own kith and kin avenged  
These evil events, as everybody knows, 2480  
But the price was high: one of them paid  
With his life. Heathcyn, lord of the Geats,  
Met his fate there and fell in battle.  
Then, as I have heard, Hygelac's sword  
Was raised in the morning against Ongentheow,  
His brother's killer. When Eofor cleft  
The old Swede's helmet, halved it open,  
He fell, death-pale: his feud-calloused hand

Could not stave off the fatal stroke.

“The treasures that Hygelac lavished on me 2490  
I paid for as I fought, as fortune allowed me,  
With my glittering sword. He gave me land  
And the security land brings, so he had no call  
To go looking for some lesser champion,  
Some mercenary among the Grifthas  
Or the Spear-Danes or the men of Sweden.

I marched ahead of him, always there  
At the front of the line; and I shall fight like that  
For as long as I live, as long as this sword  
Shall last, which has stood me in good stead 2500  
Late and soon, ever since I killed  
Dayraven the Frank in front of the two armies.  
He brought back no looted breastplate  
To the Frisian king, but fell in battle,  
Their standard-bearer, high-born and brave.  
No sword blade sent him to his death,  
My bare hands stilled his heartbeats  
And wrecked the bone-house. Now blade and hand,  
Sword and sword-stroke, will assay the hoard.”

Beowulf spoke, made a formal boast 2510  
For the last time: “I risked my life  
Often when I was young. Now I am old,  
But as king of this people I shall pursue this fight  
For the glory of winning, if the evil one will only  
Abandon his earth-fort and face me in the open.”

Then he addressed each dear companion  
One final time, those fighters in their helmets,  
Resolute and high-born: “I would rather not  
Use a weapon if I knew another way  
To grapple with the dragon and make good my boast 2520



Heat was ignited. The hoard-guard recognized  
A human voice, the time was over  
For peace and parleying. Pouring forth  
In a hot battle-fume, the breath of the monster  
Burst from the rock. There was a rumble underground.  
Down there in the barrow, Beowulf the warrior  
Lifted his shield: the outlandish thing                    2560  
Writhed and convulsed and viciously  
Turned on the king, whose keen-edged-sword,  
And heirloom inherited by ancient right,  
Was already in his hand. Roused to a fury,  
Each antagonist struck terror in the other.  
Unyielding, the lord of his people loomed  
By his tall shield, sure of his ground,  
While the serpent looped and unleashed itself.  
Swaddled in flames, it came gliding and flexing  
And racing toward its fate. Yet his shield defended                    2570  
The renowned leader's life and limb  
For a shorter time than he meant it to:  
That final day was the first time  
When Beowulf fought and fate denied him  
Glory in battle. So the king of the Geats  
Raised his hand and struck hard  
At the enameled scales, but hardly cut through:  
The blade flashed and slashed yet the blow  
Was far less powerful than the hard-pressed king  
Had need of at the moment. The hoard-keeper                    2580  
Went into a spasm and spouted deadly flames:  
When he felt the stroke, battle-fire  
Billowed and spewed. Beowulf was foiled  
Of a glorious victory. The glittering sword,  
Infallible before that day,  
Failed when he unsheathed it, as it never should have.  
For the son of Ecgtheow, it was no easy thing  
To have to give ground like that and go

Unwillingly to inhabit another home  
In a place beyond; so every man must yield 2590  
The leasehold of his days.

Before long  
The fierce contenders clashed again.  
The hoard-guard took heart, inhaled and swelled up  
And got a new wind; he who had once ruled  
Was furlled in fire and had to face the worst.  
No help or backing was to be had then  
From his high-born comrades; that hand-picked troop  
Broke ranks and ran for their lives  
To the safety of the wood. But within one heart  
Sorrow welled up: in a man of worth 2600  
The claims of kinship cannot be denied.

His name was Wiglaf, a son of Weohstan's,  
A well-regarded Shylfing warrior  
Related to Aelfhere. When he saw his lord  
Tormented by the heat of his scalding helmet,  
He remember the bountiful gifts he bestowed on him,  
How well he lived among the Waegmundings,  
The freehold he inherited from his father before him.  
He could not hold back: one hand brandished  
The yellow-timbered shield, the other drew his sword-- 2610  
An ancient blade that was said to have belonged  
To Eanmund, the son of Ohthere, the one  
Weohstan had slain when he was in exile without friends.  
He carried the arms to the victim's kinfolk,  
The burnished helmet, the webbed chain-mail  
And that relic of the giants. But Onela returned  
The weapons to him, rewarded Weohstan  
With Eadmund's war-gear. He ignored the blood-feud,  
The fact that Eadmund was his brother's son.

Weohstan kept that war-gear for a lifetime, 2620  
The sword and the mail-shirt, until it was the son's turn  
To follow his father and perform his part.  
Then, in old age, at the end of his days  
Among the Weather-Geats, he bequeathed to Wiglaf  
Innumerable weapons.

And now the youth  
Was to enter the line of battle with his lord,  
His first time to be tested as a fighter.  
His spirit did not break and the ancestral blade  
Would keep its edge, as the dragon discovered  
As soon as they came together in combat. 2630

Sad at heart, addressing his companions,  
Wiglaf spoke wise and fluent words:  
"I remember that time when the mead was flowing,  
How we pledged loyalty to our lord in the hall,  
Promised our ring-giver we would be worth our price,  
Make good the gift of the war-gear,  
Those swords and helmets, as and when  
His need required it. He picked us out  
From the army deliberately, honored us and judged us  
Fit for this action, made me these lavish gifts-- 2640  
And all because he considered us the best  
Of his arms-bearing thanes. And now, although  
He wanted this challenge to be the one he'd face  
By himself alone--the shepherd of our land,  
A man unequalled in the quest for glory  
And a name for daring--now the day has come  
When this lord we serve needs sound men  
To give him their support. Let us go to him,  
Help our leader through the hot flame  
And dread of the fire. As God is my witness, 2650  
I would rather my body were robbed in the same  
Burning blaze as my gold-giver's body

Than go back home bearing arms.  
That is unthinkable, unless we have first  
Slain the foe and defended the life  
Of the prince of the Weather-Geats. I well know  
That things he has done for us deserve better.  
Should he alone be left exposed  
To fall in battle? We must bond together,  
Shield and helmet, mail-shirt and sword.” 2660

Then he wadded the dangerous reek and went  
Under arms to his lord, saying only:  
“Go on, dear Beowulf, do everything  
You said you would when you were still young  
And vowed you would never let your name and fame  
Be dimmed while you lived. Your deeds are famous,  
So stay resolute, my lord, defend your life now  
With the whole of your strength. I shall stand by you.”

After those word, a wildness rose  
In the dragon again and drove it to attack, 2670  
Heaving up fire, hunting for enemies,  
The humans it loathed. Flames lapped the shield,  
Charred it to the boss, and the body armor  
On the young warrior was useless to him.  
But Wiglaf did well under the wide rim  
Beowulf shared with him once his own had shattered  
In sparks and ashes.

                    Inspired again  
By the thought of glory, the war-king threw  
His whole strength behind a sword-stroke  
And connected with the skull. And Naegling snapped. 2680  
Beowulf’s ancient iron-gray sword  
Let him down in the fight. It was never his fortune  
To be helped in combat by the cutting-edge  
Of weapons made of iron. When he yielded a sword,  
No matter how blooded and hard-edged the blade



Towards a seat on the rampart. He steadied his gaze  
On those gigantic stones, saw how the earthwork  
Was braced with arches built over columns.  
And now that thane unequalled for goodness 2720  
With his own hands washed his lord's wounds,  
Swabbed the weary prince with water,  
Bathed him clean, unbuckled his helmet.

Beowulf spoke: in spite of his wounds,  
Mortal wounds, he still spoke  
For he well knew his days in the world  
Had been lived out to the end: his allotted time  
Was drawing to a close, death was very near.

“Now is the time when I would have wanted  
To bestow this armor on my own son, 2730  
Had it been my fortune to have fathered an heir  
And live on in his flesh. For fifty years  
I ruled this nation. No king  
Of any neighboring clan would dare  
Face me with troops, none had the power  
To intimidate me. I took what came,  
Cared for and stood by things in my keeping,  
Never fomented quarrels, never  
Swore to a lie. All this consoles me,  
Doomed as I am and sickening for death; 2740  
Because of my right way, the Ruler of Mankind  
Need never blame me when the breath leaves my body  
For murder of kinsmen. Go now quickly,  
Dearest Wiglaf, under the gray stone  
Where the dragon is laid out, lost to his treasure;  
Hurry to feast your eyes on the hoard.  
Away you go: I want to examine  
That ancient gold, gaze my fill  
On those garnered jewels; my going will be easier

For having seen the treasure, a less troubled letting-go  
Of the life and lordship I have long maintained.”

2750

And so, I have heard, the son of Weohstan  
Quickly obeyed the command of his languishing  
War-weary lord; he went in his chain-mail  
Under the rock-piled roof of the barrow,  
Exulting in his triumph, and saw beyond the seat  
A treasure-trove of astonishing richness,  
Wall-hangings that were a wonder to behold,  
Glittering gold spread across the ground,  
The old dawn-scorching serpent’s den  
Packed with goblets and vessels of the past,  
Tarnished and corroding. Rusty helmets  
All eaten away. Armbands everywhere,  
Artfully wrought. How easily treasure  
Buried in the ground, gold hidden  
However skillfully, can escape from any man!

2760

And he saw too a standard, entirely of gold,  
Hanging high over the hoard,  
A masterpiece of filigree; it glowed with light  
So he could make out the ground at his feet  
And inspect the valuables. Of the dragon there was no  
Remaining sign: the sword had dispatched him.  
Then, the story goes, a certain man  
Plundered the hoard in the immemorial howe,  
Filled his arms with flagons and plates,  
Anything he wanted; and took the standard also,  
Most brilliant of banners.

2770

Already the blade  
Of the old king’s sharp killing-sword  
Had done its worst: the one who had for long  
Minded the hoard, hovering over gold,  
Unleashing fire, surging forth

2780

Midnight after midnight, had been mown down.

Wiglaf went quickly, keen to get back,  
Excited by the treasure. Anxiety weighed  
On his brave heart--he was hoping he would find  
The leader of the Geats alive where he had left him  
Helpless, earlier, on the open ground.  
So he came to the place, carrying the treasure,  
And found his lord bleeding profusely,  
His life at an end: again he began 2790  
To swab his body. The beginnings of an utterance  
Broke out from the king's breast-cage.  
The old lord gazed sadly at the gold.

“To the everlasting Lord of All,  
To the King of Glory, I give thanks  
That I beheld this treasure here in front of me,  
That I have been allowed to leave my people  
So well endowed on the day I die.  
Now that I have bartered my last breath  
To own this fortune, it is up to you 2800  
To look after their needs. I can hold out no longer.  
Order my troop to construct a barrow  
On a headland on the coast, after my pyre has cooled.  
It will loom in the horizon at Hronesness  
And be a reminder among my people--  
So that in coming times crews under sail  
Will call it Beowulf's barrow, as they steer  
Ships across the wide and shrouded waters.”

Then the king in his great-heartedness unclasped  
The collar of gold from his neck and gave it 2810  
To the young thane, telling him to use  
It and the war shirt and the gilded helmet well.



Through the life they had been lent.

Before long

The battle-dodgers abandoned the wood,  
The ones who had let down their lord earlier,  
The tail-turners, ten of them together.  
When he needed them the most, they had made off.  
Now they were ashamed and came behind shields,       2850  
In their battle-outfits, to where the old man lay.  
They watched Wiglaf, sitting worn out,  
A comrade shoulder to shoulder with his lord,  
Trying in vain to bring him round with water.  
Much as he wanted to, there was no way  
He could preserve his lord's life on earth  
Or alter in the least the Almighty's will.  
What God judged right would rule what happened  
To every man, as it does to this day.

Then a stern rebuke was bound to come               2860  
From the young warrior to the ones who had been cowards.  
Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, spoke  
Disdainfully and in disappointment:  
"Anyone ready to admit the truth  
Will surely realize the lord of men  
Who showered you with gifts and gave you the armor  
You are standing in--when he would distribute  
Helmets and mail-shirts to men on the mead-benches,  
A prince treating his thanes in hall  
To the best he could find, far or near--               2870  
Was throwing weapons uselessly away.  
It would be a sad waste when the war broke out.  
Beowulf had little cause to brag  
About his armed guard; yet God who ordains  
Who wins or loses allowed him to strike  
With his own blade when bravery was needed.

There was little I could do to protect his life  
In the heat of the fray, yet I found new strength  
Welling up when I went to help him.  
Then my sword connected and the deadly assaults        2880  
Of our foe grew weaker, the fire coursed  
Less strongly from his head. But when the worst happened  
Too few rallied around the prince.

“So it is goodbye now to all you know and love  
On your home-ground, the open-handedness,  
The giving of war-swords. Every one of you  
With freeholds of land, our whole nation,  
Will be dispossessed, once princes from beyond  
Get tidings of how you turned and fled  
And disgraced yourselves. A warrior will sooner        2890  
Die than live a life of shame.”

Then he ordered the outcome of the fight to be reported  
To those camped on the ridge, that crowd of retainers  
Who had sat all morning, sad at heart,  
Shield-bearers wondering about  
The man they loved: would this day be his last  
Or would he return. He told the truth  
And did not balk, the rider who bore  
News to the cliff-top. He addressed them all:  
“Now the people’s pride and love,        2900  
The lord of the Geats, is laid on his deathbed,  
Brought down by the dragon’s attack.  
Beside him lies the bane of his life,  
Dead from knife-wounds. There was no way  
Beowulf could manage to get the better  
Of the monster with his sword. Wiglaf sits  
At Beowulf’s side, the son of Weohstan,  
The living warrior watching by the dead,  
Keeping weary vigil, holding a wake

For the loved and the loathed. 2910

Now war is looming  
Over our nation, soon it will be known  
To Franks and Frisians, far and wide,  
That the king is gone. Hostility has been great  
Among the Franks since Hygelac sailed forth  
At the head of a war-fleet into Friesland:  
There the Hetware harried and attacked  
And overwhelmed him with great odds.  
The leader in his war-gear was laid low,  
Fell amongst followers; that lord did not favor  
His company with spoils. The Merovingian king 2920  
Has been an enemy to us ever since.

“Nor do I expect peace of pact-keeping  
Of any sort from the Swedes. Remember:  
At Ravenswood, Ongentheow  
Slaughtered Haethcyn, Hrethel’s son,  
When the Geat people in their arrogance  
First attacked the fierce Shylfings.  
The return blow was quickly struck  
By Ohthere’s father. Old and terrible,  
He felled the sea-king and saved is own 2930  
Aged wife, the mother of Onela  
And of Ohthere, bereft of her gold rings.  
Then he kept hard on the heels of the foe  
And drove them, leaderless, lucky to get away,  
In a desperate route to Ravenswood.  
His army surrounded the weary remnant  
Where they nursed their wounds; all through the night  
He howled threats at those huddled survivors,  
Promises to axe their bodies open  
When dawn broke, dangle them from gallows 2940  
To feed the birds. But at first light  
When their spirits were lowest, relief arrived.

They heard the sound of Hygelac's horn,  
His trumpet calling as he came to find them,  
The hero in pursuit, at hand with troops.

“The bloody swathe that Swedes and Geats  
Cut through each other was everywhere.  
No one could miss their murderous feuding.  
Then the old man made his move,  
Pulled back, barred his people in: 2950  
Ongentheow withdrew to higher ground.  
Hygelac's pride and prowess as a fighter  
Were known to the earl; he had no confidence  
That he could hold out against that horde of seamen,  
Defend wife and the ones he loved  
From the shock of the attack. He retreated for shelter  
Behind the earth wall. Then Hygelac swooped  
On the Swedes at bay, his banners swarmed  
Into their refuge, the Geat forces  
Drove forward to destroy the camp. 2960  
There in his gray hairs, Ongentheow  
Was cornered, ringed around with swords.  
And it came to pass that the king's fate  
Was in Eofor's hands, and in his alone.  
Wulf, son of Wonred, went for him in anger,  
Split him open so that blood came spurting  
From under his hair. The old hero  
Still did not flinch, but parried fast,  
Hit back with a harder stroke:  
The king turned and took him on. 2970  
Then Wonred's son, the brave Wulf,  
Could land no blow against the aged lord.  
Ongentheow divided his helmet  
So that he buckled and bowed his bloodied head  
And dropped to the ground. But his doom held off.  
Though he was cut deep, he recovered again.

“With his brother down, the undaunted Eofor,  
Hygelac’s thane, hefted his sword  
And smashed murderously at the massive helmet  
Past the lifted shield. And the king collapsed,                   2980  
The shepherd of people was sheared of life.

“Many then hurried to help Wulf,  
Bandaged and lifted him, now that they were left  
Masters of the blood-soaked battleground.  
One warrior stripped the other,  
Looted Ongentheow’s iron mail-coat,  
His hard sword-hilt, his helmet too,  
And carried the graith to King Hygelac;  
He accepted the prize, promised fairly  
That reward would come, and kept his word.                   2990  
For their bravery in action, when they arrived home  
Eofor and Wulf were overloaded  
By Hrethel’s son, Hygelac the Geat,  
With gifts of land and linked rings  
That were worth a fortune. They had won glory,  
So there was no gainsaying his generosity.  
And he gave Eofor his only daughter  
To bide at home with him, an honor and a bond.

“So this bad blood between us and the Swedes,  
This vicious feud, I am convinced,                   3000  
Is bound to revive; they will cross our borders  
And attack in force once they find out  
That Beowulf is dead. In days gone by  
When our warriors fell and we were undefended  
He kept our coffers and our kingdoms safe.  
He worked for the people, but as well as that  
He behaved like a hero.

    We must hurry now

To take a last look at the king  
And launch him, lord and lavisher of rings,  
On the funeral road. His royal pyre 3010  
Will melt no small amount of gold:  
Heaped there in the hoard, it was bought at heavy cost,  
And that pile of rings he paid for at the end  
With his own life will go up in flames,  
Be furl'd in fire: treasure no follower  
Will wear in his memory, nor lovely woman  
Link and attach as a torque around her neck--  
But often, repeatedly, in the path of exile  
They shall walk bereft, bowed under woe,  
Now that their leader's laugh is silenced, 3020  
High spirits quenched. Many a spear  
Dawn-cold to the touch will be taken down  
And waved on high; the swept harp  
Won't waken warriors, but the raven winging  
Darkly over the doomed will have news,  
Tidings of the eagle of how he hoked and ate,  
How the wolf and he made short work of the dead."

Such was the drift of the dire report  
That gallant man delivered. He got little wrong  
In what he told and predicted. 3030

The whole troop

Rose in tears, then took their way  
To the uncanny scene under Earnaness.  
There, on the sand, where his soul had left him,  
They found him at rest, their ring-giver  
From days gone by. The great man  
Had breathed his last. Beowulf the King  
Had indeed met with a marvelous death.

But what they saw first was far stranger:  
The serpent on the ground, gruesome and vile,

Lying facing him. The fire-dragon 3040  
Was scaresomely burnt, scorched all colors.  
From head to tail, his entire length  
Was fifty feet. He had shimmered forth  
On the night air once, then winged back  
Down to his den; but death owned him now,  
He would never enter his earth-gallery again.  
Beside him stood pitchers and piled-up dishes,  
Silent flagons, precious swords  
Eaten through with rust, ranged as they had been  
While they waited their thousand winters underground. 3050  
That huge cache, gold inherited  
From an ancient race, was under a spell--  
Which meant no one was ever permitted  
To enter the king-hall unless God himself,  
Mankind's Keeper, True King of Triumphs,  
Allowed some person pleasing him--  
And in his eyes worthy--to open the hoard.

What came about brought to nothing  
The hopes of the one who had wrongly hidden  
Riches under the rock face. First the dragon slew 3060  
That man among men, who in turn made fierce amends  
And settled the feud. Famous for his deeds  
A warrior may be, but it remains a mystery  
Where his life will end, when he may no longer  
Dwell in the mead-hall among his own.  
So it was with Beowulf, when he faced the cruelty  
And cunning of the mound-guard. He himself was ignorant  
Of how his departure from the world would happen.  
The high-born chiefs who had buried the treasure  
Declared it until doomsday so accursed 3070  
That whoever robbed it would be guilty of wrong  
And grimly punished for their transgression,  
Hasped in hell-bonds in heathen shrines.

Yet Beowulf's gaze at the gold treasure  
When he first saw it had not been selfish.

Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, spoke:

“Often when one man follows his own will  
Many are hurt. This happened to us.  
Nothing we advised could ever convince  
The prince we loved, our land's guardian, 3080

Not to vex the custodian of the gold,  
Let him lie where he was long accustomed,  
Lurk there under the earth until the end of the world.  
He held to his high destiny. The hoard is laid bare,  
But at a grave cost; it was too cruel a fate  
That forced the king to that encounter.

I have been inside and seen everything  
Amassed in the vault. I managed to enter  
Although no great welcome awaited me  
Under the earth wall. I quickly gathered up 3090

A huge pile of the priceless treasures  
Handpicked from the hoard and carried them here  
Where the king could see them. He was still himself,  
Alive, aware, and in spite of his weakness  
He had many requests. He wanted me to greet you  
And order the building of a barrow that would crown  
The site of his pyre, serve as his memorial,  
In a commanding position, since of all men  
To have lived and thrived and lorded it on earth  
His worth and due as a warrior were the greatest. 3100

Now let us again go quickly  
And feast our eyes on that amazing fortune  
Heaped under the wall. I will show the way  
And take you close to those coffers packed with rings  
And bars of gold. Let a bier be made  
And got ready quickly when we come out  
And then let us bring the body of our lord,

The man we loved, to where he will lodge  
For a long time in the care of the Almighty.”

Then Weohstan’s son, stalwart to the end, 3110  
Had orders given to owners of dwellings,  
Many people of importance in the land,  
To fetch wood from far and wide  
For the good man’s pyre.

“Now shall flame consume  
Our leader in battle, the blaze darken  
Round him who stood his ground in the steel-hail,  
When the arrow-storm shot from bowstrings  
Pelted from the shield-wall. The shaft hit home.  
Feather-fledged, it finned the barb in flight.”

Next the wise son of Weohstan 3120  
Called from among the king’s thanes  
A group of seven: he selected the best  
And entered with them, the eighth of their number,  
Under the God-cursed roof; one raised  
A lighted torch and led the way.

No lots were cast for who should loot the hoard  
For it was obvious to them that every bit of it  
Lay unprotected within the vault,  
There for the taking. It was no trouble  
To hurry to work and haul out 3130  
The priceless store. They pitched the dragon  
Over the cliff top, let tide’s flow  
And backwash take the treasure-minder.  
Then coiled gold was loaded on a cart  
In great abundance, and the gray-haired leader,  
The prince of his bier, born to Hronesness.

The Geat people built a pyre for Beowulf,  
Stacked and decked it until it stood four-square,

Hung with helmets, heavy war-shields  
And shining armor, just as he had ordered. 3140

Then his warriors laid him in the middle of it,  
Mourning a lord far-famed and beloved.  
On a height they kindled the hugest of all  
Funeral fires; fumes of wood smoke  
Billowed darkly up, the blaze roared  
And drowned out their weeping, wind died down  
And flames wrought havoc in the hot bone-house,  
Burning it to the core. They were disconsolate  
And wailed aloud for their lord's decease.

A Geat woman too sang out in grief: 3150  
With hair bound up, she unburdened herself  
Of her worst fears, a wild litany  
Of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,  
Enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,  
Slavery and abasement. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

Then the Geat people began to construct  
A mound on a headland, high and imposing,  
A marker that sailors could see from far away,  
And in ten days they had done the work.  
It was their hero's memorial; what remained from fire 3160  
They housed inside it, behind a wall

As worthy of him as their workmanship could make it.  
And they buried torques in the barrow, and jewels  
And a trove of such things as trespassing men  
Had once dared to drag from the hoard.  
They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure,  
Gold under gravel, gone to earth,  
As useless to men now as it ever was.

Then twelve warriors rode around the tomb,  
Chieftain's sons, champions in battle, 3170  
All of them distraught, chanting in dirges,  
Mourning his loss as a man and a king.

They extolled his heroic exploits  
And gave thanks for his greatness; which was the proper thing,  
For a man should praise a prince whom he holds dear  
And cherish his memory when that moment comes  
When he has to be convoyed from his bodily home.  
So the Geat people, his hearth companions,  
Sorrowed for the lord who had been laid low.  
They said that of all the kings upon the earth  
He was the man most gracious and fair-minded,  
Kindest to his people and keenest to win fame.

3180